The Lakewood Boys in the African Jungle

L. P. WYMAN

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BOYS
IN THE
AFRICAN
JUNGLE

WYMAN

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COMPANY

$14-

The herd crashed by not more than three or four rods to their right.

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THE LAKEWOOD BOYS
IN THE AFRICAN JUNGLE

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The Golden Boys Series

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The Lakewood Boys Series

A SERIES OF STORIES FOR BOYS 12 TO 16 YEARS OF AGE

By L. P. WYMAN, Ph.D.

Dean of the Pennsylvania Military College

The Lakewood Boys in the Frozen North
The Lakewood Boys and the Lost Mine
The Lakewood Boys and the Polo Ponies
The Lakewood Boys on the Lazy S
The Lakewood Boys in the South Sea Islands
The Lakewood Boys in Montana
The Lakewood Boys in the African Jungle

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THE LAKEWOOD BOYS IN THE AFRICAN JUNGLE

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THE LAKEWOOD BOYS IN THE AFRICAN JUNGLE

CHAPTER ONE

A CLOSE FINISH

"LEAVE it."

Jack Lakewood heard the order just as he was about to swing his mallet against the ball and, knowing that it was his brother, Bob, who had shouted, he turned his pony slightly and, instead of completing the stroke, raced for the goal some ninety yards away. He had nearly reached the end of the playing field and was about to pull up his pony when the white ball rolled by him and came to a stop just a few feet in front of the goal posts. Like a flash he was after it and before the Yale man, who he knew was coming as fast as his pony could run, could hook his mallet, he had driven the ball between the posts and The Fortress had scored the first goal in the final match of the year.

"That's team work, old man," Bob Lakewood said, in a low tone, as the brothers were riding back for the second throwin.

"But you sure did drive it just right," Jack returned.

"Only it didn't have legs enough without your help," Bob smiled.

Jack, playing at number one, got the tap off and a quick stroke sent the ball back to Bob at number two. He by skillful dribbling, managed to get it free from the others and, with one of his spectacular strokes, sent it spinning toward the Yale goal. Jack had turned and raced for the goal as soon as he had received the tap off and again the ball rolled past him heading directly for the posts. But this time Yale's Number four was in position and, before Jack could reach the ball, he had driven it back. However it did not go far for The Fortress was famous for its team work and, long before it had spent its force, number three had intercepted it and again Jack had a swing at it. His stroke was perfect but again Yale's number four was between him and the goal and, as Jack afterward declared, that man sure did know how to do his stuff. Again the ball was sent down the field toward the other goal.

Bob was after it almost before it had started but so was Yale's number two and the latter, be-

ing nearer, reached it first and swung for what looked like a sure goal. But George Strand, playing at number four, by a daring spurt, reached it just before it rolled between the posts and drove it to the boards and a tremendous shout of relief went up from the stands which were crowded to their limit.

After that neither team was able to get the ball within striking distance of the goal and the chucker ended with the score one to nothing in favor of The Fortress.

"You sure saved our bacon that time, George, old man," Bob declared as he slipped from his panting pony.

"Guess I had a horseshoe in my pocket," Strand grinned.

"Must have had it around your neck if you had it anywhere," Jack laughed. "You've got no pockets in those breeches."

"As pretty a stroke as I ever saw," declared Fred Blake, The Fortress number three. "But, I tell you fellows, we've got our work cut out for us if we're going to beat those fellows. They're playing polo if anyone should ask you."

"You said a mouthful and I don't mean maybe," Jack told him as he swung to his saddle.

"We'll keep on the defensive this chucker unless they score two goals on us," Bob, who was captain

of the team, ordered as he leaped to the back of Princess Pat, his fastest pony. "Keep right in front of the goal all the time, George, and don't go through unless I give you the signal."

"Righto," George grinned as the whistle for the second chucker sounded.

Yale's number one got the tap off and, in less than ten seconds, their number two had the ball well down toward The Fortress' goal. But, in his eagerness he sent it a bit too far and, before he could reach it for the final stroke, Strand had returned it nearly to the middle of the field. Bob was waiting for it and carried it almost to the Yale goal but his mallet was hooked and he lost it to their number three. Meanwhile their number two had turned in time to receive it as it came spinning along the ground and caught it with a powerful stroke which lifted it into the air and over Strand's head and between the posts. It was a beautiful stroke and received the applause it deserved.

Neither goal was again in danger until just before the end of the chucker when a lucky stroke gave Yale another tally. It was a beautiful drive from a difficult angle and probably the best of players could not have made it twice in a hundred tries. But this time it went through and the chucker ended with Yale one point ahead.

"Not so good," Jack grumbled as he slid from his pony.

"That last goal was pure luck," Bob consoled him.

"But it counted just the same," Blake reminded him as he tightened his girt.

"Well, we'll go get 'em this next chucker," Bob told them. "It won't do to let them get a lead of more than one goal.

"I'll say it won't," Jack assured him.

That chucker was pronounced one of the fastest ever seen on the field. Yale put forth her best effort to maintain her lead but, before the period was half over Bob had tied the score with a dribble nearly the entire length of the field and just before the bell rang Blake shot another from near center. By a masterly exhibition of riding off the cadets had prevented Yale from adding to their score and the chucker ended with The Fortress leading by one goal.

"Better, eh?" Bob whispered to Jack as they were changing ponies.

"Better is right but, don't forget, the game's only half done and there's time for lots to happen."

In the fourth chucker neither side scored but in the fifth Yale got three goals to the cadets one and it was a worried quartette that shifted to their best ponies for the sixth and last chucker.

"Offensive is our game now," Bob told them as they hunched close together for a hurried conference. "We've got to put it through three times to win and they'll likely not try very hard to score."

The first goal came so quickly that it was through almost before the crowd knew that the chucker had started. Jack got the tap off and shot the ball back to Bob who with one powerful stroke drove it fairly between the poles.

"Two more, now," he said in a low tone as they lined up for the next throwin.

But the next one did not come so easily, and only two minutes were left when, after the ball had been chased up and down the field a dozen times, Blake shot it to Jack, who was only a few feet away from the goal, and he put it through for the tally that tied the score. So far Yale had been playing almost entirely on the defensive but now that the score was tied the cadets knew that their opponents would assume the offense and they, in turn, would have to be more careful in guarding their own goal.

"Keep right in front of our goal," Bob said to Strand, "and don't let them get it through."

"I get you," Strand smiled.

A minute passed and thirty seconds more and neither side had been able to work the ball to within striking distance of the goal. But thirty

seconds remained to play when Bob got the ball about two-thirds down the field from the Yale goal. But the Yale forwards were too near for him to start a dribble so he struck with all his strength and the ball, rising about four feet from the ground, flew down the field. It was a splendid drive but he knew it did not have enough force to reach the goal. "Now, Pat" he shouted giving the pony her head. Princess Pat was off like a flash but three others were close behind and coming like the wind.

Meanwhile Jack was speeding for the ball from another angle and Bob saw that his brother would reach it first. So he drew Princess Pat up a bit at the same time shouting: "Take it, Jack."

The ball was about thirty yards from the goal and still rolling when Jack reached it just in time to hit it a clip before Yale's number four could knock it out of danger. It was a side stroke and a difficult one but, as Blake declared after the game, it made the grade, and the bell rang before the ball had come to rest fifty feet behind the goal posts.

"Just and with nothing to spare," Jack grinned as he dismounted behind the goal posts.

"Well, enough is as good as a feast," Strand assured him.

The game brought the commencement exercises to a close and an hour later Bob and Jack Lakewood were busily engaged in packing for they were

to take the night train for their home in Maine. They were nearly finished when the door opened and George Strand entered.

"Well, we sure did end up in a blaze of glory," he declared as he sat down on one of the cots.

"But it was nip and tuck, let me tell you," Jack said as he strapped a suitcase.

"As long's it was in favor of nip it was all right," Bob laughed.

"What are you fellows going to do this summer?" George asked after a moment's pause.

"Haven't made any plans yet," Bob told him, "except that we've got some work to do on our photo-radio that'll probably keep us busy for a week or more. Then I suppose we'll go up to Lakewood or to Moosehead. What are you going to do?"

"Same old thing I suppose, Atlantic City most of the summer. But, to tell the truth, I'm mighty sick of the place."

"Why don't you come up to Maine and spend the summer with us," Jack asked.

"We'd sure love to have you," Bob added. "And we'd show you some real sport too if you like the woods."

"You mean it? The invitation, I mean?" George showed his eargerness in his face.

"Of course we mean it," Bob assured him.

"But how about your folks? They—"

"Would be tickled to death to have you," Jack interrupted.

"We've got plenty of room and they're always glad for us to have our friends there," Bob added.

"Gee, but I'd love to come," George said slowly.

"Then it's settled," Jack declared.

"If the folks'll let me," George added.

"Don't you think they will?" Bob asked anxiously.

"I guess they will but—"

"They'll get a letter from mother in a few days," Bob promised.

The three boys had supper together in Philadelphia and shortly after seven o'clock boarded the Bar Harbor express for the North. Strand, who lived in New York City, bade them good-by a couple of hours later and promised to be with them inside of two weeks provided his parents would allow him to come.

"We'll be on the watch for you," Jack shouted as the train pulled out.

"Some boy that," he declared as they entered the car.

"The best ever," Bob agreed as he swung his suitcase to the rack.

The trip home was uneventful and, shortly before noon the next day, the train pulled in at the

station of the little town of Skowhegan. Mr. Lakewood was there to meet them and soon they were rolling through the town with Bob at the wheel. Dinner was ready and, as soon as greetings were over, the family sat down to the meal.

Bob had noticed that his father appeared somewhat preoccupied and wondered what was troubling him. But he asked no questions knowing that he would be told all in good time if there was anything wrong. Jack, however, was not so patient and, before the meal was half through, asked:

"What's the meaning of that ridge in your forehead, dad?"

His father gave a slight start. "What do you mean?" he smiled.

"Now, there's no use trying to fool me, you know: something's wrong," Jack told him.

"You must have sharp eyes," Mr. Lakewood retorted.

"You bet," Jack grinned. "Out with it."

"Well, boys, I reckon I'll have to acknowledge that I am worried," he said slowly. Then as he paused, Bob asked:

"Nothing wrong at the mill, is there?"

"Oh, no, the mill's all right. It's your Uncle Si."

"What about him? Haven't you heard from him yet?" Jack demanded in an anxious tone.

"Not a word for nearly four months."

"That's strange," Bob mused.

"It's more than strange, it's alarming," Mr. Lakewood corrected him.

"Have you cabled?" Bob asked.

"No. You see, there's really no place to cable to where it would do any good so far as I can see."

"I guess that's right, too," Bob agreed.

"What part of Africa was it where he went?" Jack asked.

"He started from the town of Loanda in the state of Angola," his father told him.

"That's down toward the southern part, isn't it?"

"About three quarters down."

"And he was going straight across, wasn't he?"

"As nearly as he could make it, yes."

"And about how far would that be?" Bob asked.

"He judged that he would travel about two thousand miles."

"And it's been four months since he started?"

"It'll be four months to-morrow."

"Then he could have made it by averaging 250 miles a month."

"Gee, but that would be slow traveling," Jack declared.

"He expected to make it in about ten weeks. You see, he expected to make a good part of the trip by water, and took two collapsible canoes with

him for that purpose. There's a number of rivers in that region and he estimated that nearly a third of the trip could be made on them."

"Then he ought to have been out about six weeks ago?" Bob asked.

"Something like that. Of course you never can tell what delays are going to happen on a trip of that kind and I didn't begin to worry until he'd been gone three months."

"How many were there in the party?" Jack asked.

"Only four."

"I remember now. There was a white man that he'd met before and they were to take two natives."

"That's right," his father told him.

"Uncle Si sure is bugs for getting into outlandish places," Bob declared.

"And he always was," Mrs. Lakewood assured him. "That is if I understand what you mean by bugs."

"I guess you do all right," Bob smiled.

"And I thought we were going to have a quiet summer at home," Jack sighed after a moment's pause in the conversation.

"Well, why can't you?" his mother asked quickly.

"What?"

"I asked why you couldn't have a quiet summer at home," his mother repeated.

"With Uncle Si lost in Africa?"

"But—"

"Of course we've got to go and find him," Jack declared as though any other proposition was not to be considered.

"But how could you find him?" Mrs. Lakewood, now thoroughly alarmed, asked.

"I'll bet we can find him if he's alive," Jack boasted.

"But Africa is such a big place," his mother objected. "And there's all kinds of wild animals there to say nothing of cannibals and—"

"I know, but we can't leave Uncle Si there when there's a chance of saving him," Bob interrupted.

"But is there a chance?" Mr. Lakewood asked quietly.

"Of course there is so long as we don't know he's dead," Jack replied.

"The thing to do is to get some one who knows the country to go with you," Mr. Lakewood began.

"Then it's settled that we'll go?" Jack almost shouted.

"What do you say, mother?" Mr. Lakewood turned to his wife a slight smile on his face.

"I—I hardly know what to say," she replied. "Of course we ought to do something I suppose. It's terrible to think that perhaps Si's being held captive by some of those horrible cannibals, but to

let two young boys go out there, it doesn't seem right."

"Where do you get that young boy stuff?" Jack broke in. "Bob's most twenty and I'll be nineteen in a few weeks. And, besides, we've been in some tight places and always come out all right and—"

"And so I suppose you think you always will," his father smiled.

"But you've often said you'd rather trust us than a lot of men," Bob said.

"And so I would," his father assured him. "I only wish my health would let me go with you but I fear that is out of the question. But I won't let you go alone, that's sure. I know a man in Boston who has been there a number of times and is a celebrated hunter and I'm going to see right now if I can get him on the phone. I saw in the paper the other day that he was at home. I did him a favor once and he told me then that if ever he could do anything for me not to hesitate to call on him."

"Then, I'd say this was his chance," Bob said as his father left the room.

He was gone nearly an hour and when he returned the boys knew from the look on his face that he had been successful.

"Got him just as he was about to leave the house," he told them, "and we're in great luck."

"And he said he'd go?" Bob asked.

"He had already planned to start for Africa next Wednesday."

"And he said he'd take us?" Jack cried.

"Yes, he said he'd take you."

"You told him about Uncle Si, of course?" Jack asked.

"Of course, and he said he'd be glad to do all in his power to find him."

"When do we start?" Jack demanded.

"You're to meet him in New York Tuesday."

"And to-day's Thursday," Bob said. "That gives us only three days not counting Sunday, to get ready."

"How about George?" Jack turned to Bob.

"I'd forgotten all about him," Bob replied slowly. "I suppose we'd better send him a night letter and explain things."

"You mean George Strand?" Mr. Lakewood asked.

"Yes, sir. You see, we invited him to come up here and spend the summer with us," Bob told him.

"George is a fine young man and I would have been very glad to have had him here. Why don't you ask him to go with you. I'll meet all the expenses, of course."

"Just the thing," Jack cried. "But perhaps his folks won't let him go."

"Well, we can ask him and see," Bob declared.

"How about your picture machine?" Mr. Lakewood asked. "Going to take it with you?"

"Sure thing," both boys spoke together.

"I thought you would," their father said.

"But we've got to get right to work on it if we're going to try those new selenium plates. It means that we've got to take it pretty near all apart," Jack declared. Then, turning to Bob, he added: "You get that night letter written ready to send and I'll start right in taking the machine apart."

The machine referred to was a photo-radio invention which they had been working at off and on for nearly two years and with which they had been very successful although it still needed some improvements to make it perfect. The new plates of selenium, which they had made in the laboratory at the college would, they hoped, improve its action.

To their great joy they received a reply, shortly after noon the next day, from George Strand to the effect that his parents had consented for him to go with them and that they were to come to his home as soon as they got to New York and then they would meet the explorer after supper.

"That's fine," Mr. Lakewood declared after Bob had read the wire to him.

"What kind of a man is he?" Bob asked.

"You mean Solomon Styles?"

"Is that his name?" Jack asked.

"Yes, but most everyone calls him Sol," his father smiled.

"Is he a Jew?" Bob asked.

"Yes, but you'd never know it if it wasn't for his name. He's a big man, well over six feet and weighs about two hundred and fifty without a pound of fat on him. That is he didn't have when I saw him about two years ago. You'll like him and, what's more, you can trust him."

The boys were so busy that time flew and, almost before they realized it, they were on the train for New York. They had put the finishing touches to the photo-radio late the night before and, to their great satisfaction, it had fully met their expectations as far as they could tell from what tests they were able to make. Tearful good-bys had been said and now they were off on what was destined to be the greatest adventure of their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

"SOL"

GEORGE STRAND met them at the station and he was so excited over the prospect of the trip that he could talk of nothing else all the way to the house where they found a warm welcome from his parents and a bountiful supper awaiting them.

"I've heard of Solomon Styles although I've never met him and I'll feel fairly comfortable so long as you're going to be with him," Mr. Strand told them as they were eating.

Solomon Styles had told Mr. Lakewood to have the boys report to him not later than eight o'clock Tuesday night at the Pennsylvania Hotel. So, as soon as supper was over, they started in Mr. Strand's car.

"Hope to goodness, he doesn't object to me," George said as he skillfully drove down Fifth Avenue.

"Of course he won't," Bob assured him.

"But he might, you know. Some of these big bugs are cranky."

"But this one isn't," Jack laughed. "Father said he was a regular fellow and you know what that means."

It still lacked five minutes to the hour when they knocked on the door and heard a deep voice bid them enter.

"You're the Lakewood boys, I suppose," the giant, as Jack afterward declared he looked, greeted them as he rose from his chair.

"Yes, sir, I'm Bob," Bob told him as he grasped the outstreched hand. "And this is my brother, Jack, and this is our friend George Strand."

"Is he going with us?"

"If you do not object, sir," George replied as the question seemed to be directed to him.

"Not a bit of it, that is, I mean not a bit of objection."

"Thank you very much Mr. Styles."

"Call me that again and you stay home. My name's Sol and I don't want you to call me anything else," the big man grinned.

"All right, Sol," George smiled.

"That's better. Always did hate that name Styles. Ought to have had it changed long ago but been too busy. Sol's all right."

As Mr. Lakewood had said the man did not look as though he were anything but an American and all three of the boys took an instant liking to him. There was something about his kindly face which inspired confidence and in less than five minutes after they had met the four were chatting together

as though they had known each other all their lives.

"Boat sails two-thirty to-morrow, pier 39 East River," Sol told them after they had answered a few questions relative to their health and experience.

"About the things we should take with us?" Bob began.

"Everything's fixed. All you've got to look out for is your own duds. I'll give you a list of what you want to get to wear and you can get them in the morning."

The boys left their new friend shortly after ten o'clock promising to meet him at the pier the next day.

"Some man," Jack declared as soon as they were in the car.

"And I don't mean maybe," Bob added.

"You said a mouthful," George contributed as his share of praise.

"I'll bet he's all wool and a yard wide," Bob declared.

"And did you notice how he never seems to waste a word when he says anything?" George asked.

"Efficiency, that's him," Jack added.

"That's he, you mean," Bob corrected.

"All right, have it your own way," Jack laughed. "I always did get that wrong unless I stopped to think."

"Reminds me of the little girl when told that her

mother was calling her," George said. "She replied: 'Her ain't calling we, us don't belong to she.' "

"Reckon she could beat Jack," Bob chuckled.

Although not as large as some of the ocean greyhounds *The Empress* was by no means a small boat and the sight of her gave the boys a real thrill.

"There's Sol watching for us," Jack cried as they reached the foot of the gang plank.

"Didn't know but you'd got cold feet," the explorer grinned as they stepped onto the deck.

"Our car was held up by a traffic jam for nearly fifteen minutes," George explained.

"Well, you didn't have much time to spare," Sol assured them as the cry "All ashore that's going ashore," rang through the boat.

Mr. Strand, who had accompanied them, was forced to bid them a hurried good-by.

"Let's get your dunnage stowed and then we can be comfortable," Sol said as the gang plank was drawn in.

He led the way to the upper deck followed by the boys and stopped in front of a door just back of the wheel house.

"Thought you'd like it up here," he declared as he unlocked the door.

They found that he had secured a small suite consisting of a tiny sitting room and two state rooms each containing two berths.

"This is sure dandy," Jack exclaimed as he looked about him.

"Reckon it'll be comfortable," Sol grinned.

"And then some," Bob added.

"You must have a year's outfit in that case," Sol said a moment later, pointing to a large leather covered case which Bob had carried.

"That's our picture machine," Bob told him.

"Your what?"

"Picture machine," Bob repeated.

"You mean you're going to take moving pictures?" Sol demanded.

"No. You see, it's a sort of photo-radio outfit that we've made," Bob explained.

"What does it do?"

"Well, it sends and receives pictures in much the same way that a radio does sound."

"And does it work?"

"We'll show you to-night," Jack broke in.

"And you say you made it?"

"Yes."

"Well! Well!" Sol gasped. "You must be smarter than I thought you were. I've heard that that thing was coming soon but I didn't expect to live to see it. And you say it works?"

"Sure does," Jack laughed.

"How far will it send?" Sol was all interest now.

"Well, we've sent for several thousand miles and

they got the pictures at home but we couldn't get theirs then but we think we've fixed that part of it now."

"What kind of pictures do you send? Use a film?"

"No. You see, we send ourselves or anything we wish. Anything that's in front of it when it's working is received at the other end," Bob explained.

"Now, what do you know about that?" Sol grinned. "And I thought I was going to teach you something."

"I guess you'll be able to teach us plenty," Bob laughed.

"I suppose your folks at home have the other end of the thing," Sol remarked.

"Yes, and we promised to send to them at nine o'clock to-night," Bob told him.

"Then I'll have a chance to see how it works."

"Sure thing."

The ship was just moving away from the wharf as they came out on deck and the railing was lined with passengers waving frantic good-bys to their friends.

"There's father," George cried waving his cap to a man who was standing on the very end of the pier.

Mr. Strand caught sight of them and they con-

tinued to wave as long as they could see him. Then slowly down the river past the Statue of Liberty and out on to the broad expanse of the Atlantic the ship made its way. There were about two hundred passengers on board, Sol told them, and a large quantity of freight. He had sailed on her a number of times and knew the captain well and, a little later, he introduced them to that official, a tall powerfully built Swede.

"Ole Christiansen is one fine captain," he declared as the boys shook hands with him.

"Sol, he bane one, what you call, flatterer," the captain smiled. "But he good friend to me an' so you all good friend too."

They had seats at the captain's table and, as soon as the first meal was over and they were again out on deck, the boys voted him one of the jolliest men they had ever met. The night was warm even on the water and they remained on deck until half past eight, when Bob said:

"I reckon we'd better be getting things in shape if we're going to send at nine o'clock."

It was quite a job to get the machine set up but at ten minutes of nine everything was ready. Sol had watched every move and had asked a number of questions which they had answered as well as they were able and, by the time they had finished, he had a pretty fair idea of how it worked.

"Now, you all get out in front there and I'll throw her on," Bob ordered as soon as his watch told them it was one minute to nine.

"What'll I do?" Sol demanded.

"Anything you want to," Bob smiled as he turned the switch. "They can see us now if everything's all right," he added as he stepped around in front with them.

For a matter of ten minutes they stood in front of the machine talking together and, now and then, the boys threw kisses to their distant audience.

"Now we're going to sign off and try and get you." Bob said the words very slowly moving his lips as plainly as possible hoping that his father and mother would understand what he said.

"Blamed if it doesn't seem spooky," Sol declared as Bob threw off the switch.

He then turned another switch and instantly a space about six feet in diameter was illuminated on the wall of the room which, fortunately, was white. For a few minutes nothing appeared and both the boys were beginning to fear that something had gone wrong. But, suddenly, Mr. and Mrs. Lakewood sprang into view bowing and smiling.

"Well, I'll be—"

But Sol did not finish the statement for he saw that Mr. Lakewood was moving his lips and he bent forward to catch the silent words.

"We got you fine."

"Get it?" Jack asked, turning to Bob.

"I think so."

"What did he say?"

" 'We got you fine,' is what I made it," Bob told him.

"Same here."

"Anyone could get that," Sol declared.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Lakewood "talked" to them for some ten minutes and they understood most of what they said, then they signed off and Bob declared the show over for the night.

"I'd never have believed it," Sol declared.

"It is wonderful," George added.

"But it's really no more wonderful than the radio," Bob told them.

"Do you think it'll send all the way from Africa?" Sol asked when they were again out on deck.

"I hope so," Bob told him. "Of course," he explained, "it won't be as plain because the waves get weaker the farther they go just as with an ordinary radio."

"It'll be wonderful if we get them at all," Sol declared.

"Oh, we'll get 'em," Jack assured him.

Four days passed and, as they neared the equator, the weather grew warmer until it seemed,

as Jack put it, that you could fry an egg on deck. The weather continued fair hardly a cloud appearing in the sky at any time, but shortly before noon Saturday, a dull colored bank of clouds was visible in the west.

"Looks as though we might have a shower before long," Jack said as he and Bob were leaning over the rail watching a school of porpoises as they gamboled in the water a short distance from the ship.

"Wouldn't wonder," Bob replied.

"Hope it brings cooler weather."

"It will if it makes any change at all."

"You mean it can't get any hotter?"

"It doesn't seem as though it could."

"What do you think, Captain?"

The captain chanced to pass then at the moment and Jack was glad to get his opinion.

"You mean about the weather?" the captain asked.

"Yes. Are we going to get a shower?"

"I hardly think it will be a shower. The glass has been falling for several hours and I think we bane going to have a storm."

"Will it be a bad one?" Bob asked.

"It's not the right time o' year for the worst ones but I've seen some pretty lively blows in this latitude in the summer. It may make her shake her tail a bit."

The bank of clouds was rising steadily and by the time they had finished dinner the sky was nearly overcast, but not so much as a ripple disturbed the surface of the sea. The air was very oppressive and, although the sun was hidden, it seemed hotter than ever.

"I'll bet it going to be a humdinger when it strikes," Jack said as he mopped his face.

"It's the calm before the storm, all right," Bob declared.

"Let's go up and ask the captain if the glass is still falling," Jack suggested.

"She bane still fallin'," the captain assured them a moment later as they stood at the open window of the wheel house. "She'll blow some before long," he added.

"I'll bet it will," Bob agreed.

"Give orders to have everything made tight," the captain said turning to the second mate who was watching the glass.

He left the room at once to carry out the order and soon a dozen sailors were rushing about securing everything moveable.

"Look, Bob, over there."

Jack caught Bob's arm as he pointed off to the right of the ship.

"She's coming, all right," Bob declared as they saw what looked like a solid wall of water several

feet high advancing at high speed. Still not a breath of wind disturbed the calm.

"Better come inside here," the captain said. "She'll strike hard when she hits."

"Where's George?" Bob asked as they followed the suggestion.

"Said he was going to take a nap," Jack replied.

"Look at her come," Bob cried.

"And she's going to hit in just about a minute," Jack added.

It was a new and wonderful experience to the boys. One minute there was perfect calm and the next it seemed that a hurricane was blowing. The wall of water, as it struck the side of the ship caused it to quiver for an instant and threw spray well over the lower deck. And now, the sea, which only a moment before had been as calm as a mill pond, was a seething smother of crests as huge waves raced by the wind blowing their tops off as if trying its best to tear them to bits.

And then the rain came, not in drops but, as Jack declared, in sheets making it impossible to see more than a few yards ahead of the ship.

"She's shaking her tail, all right," Jack shouted at the top of his voice, as the bow of the ship rose high in the air only to plunge downward the next moment.

"I'll say she is," Bob agreed, clinging to the window sill.

"Will it last long?" Jack shouted at the captain who was turning the wheel slightly.

"Can't tell," he shouted back. "You ain't scared, are you?"

"Not a bit," Jack assured him.

"You needn't be. *The Empress* has been in worse storms than this."

An hour passed and the storm had in no wise abated. Indeed, it seemed to the boys that it was blowing harder than ever. Then they saw a man struggling up the companionway. Bob pulled the door open as he reached it and the first mate "blew in" as Jack afterward expressed it.

"Jim just got an SOS," he shouted at the captain.

"Where from?" the captain shouted back.

" 'Bout fifty miles away an' about six points to our port."

"What ship?"

"The *Mary Jane,* schooner, I reckon."

"Why didn't he phone to me?"

"Tried to but something's wrong with it. Couldn't get you."

"Is that all?"

"That's all, sir."

"Then go back and tell him to tell 'em we're on the way," the captain ordered as he swung the wheel over several points. "And keep me in-

formed," he added as the mate turned to leave the room.

"I'll do that, sir," the mate shouted as he pulled open the door letting in a gust of wind and water.

"Full speed ahead," the captain shouted into the speaking tube, and soon the big ship quivered as the propellers bit faster and faster into the raging waves.

"Pray God we'll get there in time," Bob heard the captain cry and a prayer went up from his heart that such might be the case.

Then the telephone rang and Bob sprang to answer it glad that it was in working order again.

"She says to hurry," the mate's voice came over the wire and Bob repeated the message to the captain.

"Any particulars?" the captain shouted back, and Bob repeated the question.

"Their rudder's broken and they've lost control," the mate told him.

"God help 'em in this sea," the captain said. "But tell 'em we're coming and to throw out a drag."

"They've done that and she's holding fairly well," the mate said as Bob transmitted the captain's words.

Just then the door was pushed open and Sol and George entered.

"Some blow, eh," the former declared as he shook the water from his face.

"Quite a breeze for a fact," the captain grinned.

"But why the burst of speed?" Sol asked.

"SOS from a boat about fifty miles in front of us," the captain told him.

"Bad case?"

"Looks like it, though from the last report they were holding their own."

"Take us most three hours to get there, eh?"

"Pretty near."

"Ought to begin to let up soon, hadn't it?"

"Seems so, but you never can tell about these blows. I've known 'em to last twenty-four hours and then quit about as sudden as they started."

Another hour passed and never, it seemed to the boys, had it taken the hand of a clock so long to make the circuit of the dial. The wind still blew a gale and the rain still came down in torrents. From time to time messages from the wireless room told them that the *Mary Jane* still floated although she was in bad shape and in danger of foundering at any time.

"Keep telling 'em that we're coming," was the captain's constant reply as Bob repeated the messages to him.

Three o'clock and, although the wind was blowing as hard as ever, the rain had nearly stopped, making it possible for them to see for some distance ahead. The wireless operator had kept in touch

with the *Mary Jane* almost continually until the last half hour, during which time no message had been received, the final word being to the effect that they feared the vessel would not float much longer.

"We ought to see her before long now," the captain said as he shifted the wheel a point.

"If she's still on the top of the water," Sol added shaking his head.

"Of course," the captain growled.

Ten minutes more dragged by and then Bob, who was now outside the wheelhouse clinging to the railing, shouted:

"I see something."

"We heading right?" Captain Ole shouted back.

"Just right," Jack, who was at Bob's side, yelled.

"It's her, I reckon," the captain said to Sol, who was still in the room.

"I reckon," Sol agreed.

The Empress was making good time in spite of the heavy sea and, in a short time, the boys could make out that it was a five masted schooner ahead. But three of the masts were standing but they knew by the distance between them that there had been two more. The hull was very low in the water and the waves were breaking entirely over it and it was only when she rose high on a crest that they were

able to see her, then she would disappear and they would hold their breath wondering if she would come up again.

"We're not going to get there much too soon," Bob shouted.

"I'll say we're not," Jack replied. "I thought she'd gone for good that time."

They were now within a few hundred yards of the ill fated vessel and a few more minutes would bring them alongside. Captain Ole had given the signal to slow down and the boys could see that the mates had two of the life boats all ready to launch should the captain give the order. None of the passengers were out on deck strict orders having been given that they were to remain inside.

"Those boats would never live a minute in this sea," Bob said shaking his head sadly.

"Shouldn't think so but I reckon Captain Ole knows what he's about," Jack replied.

"Look!"

"She's gone this time sure's guns."

They were now almost even with the schooner but, just as Captain Ole rang to stop the engines, the schooner turned completely over and, on the crest of a wave, her stern rose high in the air and, the next instant she had slid beneath the surface.

"Too late," Bob groaned.

"Too late," Jack echoed.

Seeing what had happened Captain Ole at once rang for half speed ahead and turned toward the spot where the schooner had gone down.

"May pick up some of 'em," he muttered.

"Keep your eyes open," Bob shouted.

"You bet," Jack yelled back.

"There's a big life raft and there's men on it," Bob cried a moment later.

"Let's get down on deck," Jack shouted starting down the companionway closely followed by Bob.

As they reached the lower deck directly beneath one of the life boats they found that the sailors had already seen the raft and two of them were arguing with the first mate. But he shook his head and pointed to the wheelhouse.

"Not till the old man gives the order," they heard him say.

The raft was tossing about some hundred yards away and the boys could see that the men were having all they could do to cling on. There were, they judged, ten or eleven of them.

"They'll never stick on there long," Jack cried as he turned his head to see if the captain was coming down. As Bob made no reply he quickly turned back and, for an instant, his heart nearly stopped, for Bob was not there.

CHAPTER THREE

BOB TAKES A SWIM

It is probable that Bob had never acted more quickly in his life. He had, for some moments kept his eyes fixed on the raft but, as he happened to glance down at the seething water close to the ship, he caught sight of a hand lifted, for an instant, above the surface and then it was gone. But, before he had time to even think what it meant he had taken a header over the railing and into the raging sea. Even before he struck the water the thought flashed through his mind that he had done a very foolish thing for he realized that the most powerful swimmer would stand but little chance fighting those mighty waves. He struck in the trough of the sea and his impetus carried him far beneath the surface. He opened his eyes and tried to look about hoping to catch sight of the owner of the hand, but he could see nothing. Then, slowly at first, he began to rise and, just as his head bobbed above the water, he saw the hand again and now it was only a few feet to his right. But it was gone before he could reach the spot. Taking a deep breath he plunged downward and had taken barely three

strokes when his hand hit something which he knew to be some one's head. Getting a firm grip in the hair he struggled once more to the surface. His head emerged on the crest of a wave and he caught sight of the ship now some fifty feet away, before he was swept into the trough. His burden did not struggle and the thought struck him that, in all probability, it had ceased to breath.

But he clung to it trying his best to hold the head out of the water with one hand while he fought the water with the other. But his strength was going fast and he realized that the fight could last only a very few minutes. Unburdened he might keep afloat for some time but the dead weight seemed to be dragging him down. Should he let it go and try to save himself? Only for an instant did he entertain the thought. But he was very tired and it was all he could do to keep his head above water. Then, just as he felt himself about to be dragged down, he saw something white coming toward him. He was on the top of a wave and the object struck in the trough some twenty feet away.

It was, he knew, a life preserver and he must reach it for it was his only chance. With a prayer in his heart he summoned all his strength and plunged down what seemed to him to be the side of a mountain. Could he reach it?

"Carry on, old man."

Faintly the words came to his ears and put new courage into his mind. Now it was only a yard away but it seemed as though he had not the strength to reach out and grasp it.

"You've got it, Bob."

He felt himself being drawn through the water and had presence of mind enough to know that he must cling to the white ring no matter what effort it required. But it seemed ages before he heard Jack's voice again.

"Steady now, old man."

He tried to look up but a great darkness seemed to be settling over him and, although he tried his best to resist it, it deepened and suddenly his senses left him.

As Bob slowly drifted back to consciousness his first thought was that he was dead but, as memory returned, he realized that he was lying in a bunk and he slowly opened his eyes.

"Easy, old man."

It was Jack's voice and it was Jack's hand that was placed lovingly on his forehead.

"Don't try to speak. Just take it easy."

Bob obediently closed his eyes and did not try to speak. He could feel the strength coming back into his body and, after a few minutes had passed, he opened his eyes again.

"I'm all right, now," he whispered.

"Feeling fit?" Jack asked anxiously.

"Only tired," Bob smiled.

"You're a wonder, all right."

"Did I—?"

"You sure did," Jack interrupted. "Doc says she'll come around all right though she hasn't come to yet."

"She?"

"Sure. Didn't you know it was a girl?"

"No. You see, I—"

"Never mind now. I'll tell you all about it later. Better go to sleep now."

It was easy to obey and in less than a minute Bob was in the land of Nod. When he awoke it was dark in the room. He felt much stronger and was thinking of trying to get up when the door opened and Jack entered.

"Awake?" he asked as he saw Bob's head move.

"Just woke up."

"How do you feel?"

"Better."

"That's fine. I brought up a bowl of hot soup in case you were awake. Think you're good for it?"

"Try me."

Jack propped him up with pillows and held the bowl as he slowly sipped the hot liquid.

"That was a pretty close call, wasn't it?" he finally asked.

"It was little short of a miracle," Jack declared soberly.

"How'd you get us out?"

"Caught you both on the top of a wave with boat hooks."

"The—the men?"

"Got them too. Pumped a lot of oil on the water and got a boat out finally. Got them all."

"Thank God for that."

"You bet."

"The storm's over?"

"Yep. Stopped almost as sudden as it came up, but there's some sea running still."

"What time is it?"

"Little after ten."

"Did you send to the folks?"

"Sure did."

"That's good. They'd be worried if you hadn't." Just then the door opened and Sol and George came in.

"How's the patient?" Sol asked.

"All right," Bob replied.

"Well, you're a real hero," Sol declared. "Bravest thing I ever heard of."

"More like foolishness, I'm afraid," Bob smiled.

"What do you mean, foolishness?"

"Well, I went over before I really thought what I was doing," Bob confessed.

"Now, don't try to belittle it," George said.

"No, but honest injun, if I'd stopped to think about it I don't believe I'd have done it," Bob insisted.

"Don't believe a word of it. I know him," Jack broke in.

"And now, of course, he'll have to marry the girl and live happy ever after," George added.

"By the way," Sol told them, "the girl's come to and is getting along as well as could be expected.

"Who is she?" Bob asked.

"She's the captain's daughter. Got swept off the raft in some way but how she got so far from it is a mystery to me."

"Maybe there's a current there," Jack suggested.

"How old is she?" Bob asked.

"He'll be asking if she's pretty next," George chuckled.

"And I guess he has a right to know," Sol declared. "She's about seventeen and as pretty as a picture."

"Laugh that off," Jack said turning to George.

"And you just wait till her father gets hold of you," Sol continued. "He must think his eyes of that girl and he's going to be some grateful let me tell you."

"What kind is he?" Bob asked.

"Regular yankee captain, and comes from Maine, somewhere near Rockland."

Just then a knock sounded on the door and, as Jack called come in, the door opened and a man about forty years of age entered the room.

"Here he is now," Sol cried.

"Where is he?" the man asked as Bob had sunk back in the berth.

"Over here," Sol told him. "Bob this is Captain Crawley."

Bob, seeing that escape was impossible, sat up and reached out his hand.

"Glad to know you, Captain," he smiled.

"You—you saved my little girl," the man stammered as he grasped his hand.

"I'm very glad that I was able to do it," Bob replied.

"I—I'm not much when it—it comes to—to talking but I want you to know—to know how grateful I am. My little girl's all I've got in the world and —and she means a lot to me. I—I'll never forget it." Tears were streaming down the man's face and his voice was husky with emotion.

"Please say no more about it," Bob begged. "I'm awfully glad I was successful and I'm mighty glad to know you. I'm from Maine, you know."

"You don't say. Well, if ever I can do anything for you I—I'll be only too glad to know how to do it."

"Is she coming around all right?" Sol asked.

"Coming fine, but the doc says she'd better stay in bed till morning."

"And you're going to do the same thing," Sol told Bob.

"Can't make me mad," Bob grinned.

"Irma will thank you herself in the morning," Captain Crawley said as he turned to leave the room. "She can do a better job at it than I can," he added with his hand on the knob of the door.

"That fellow's a real man if you should ask me," George declared after the captain had closed the door behind him.

"Yep, they make 'em that way up in God's country," Jack grinned.

"I believe I can go to sleep after I've had another good big bowl of that soup," Bob said. "Somehow I'm mighty sleepy."

"I'll get it for you," Jack told him.

"Sleep'll do you more good than anything else," Sol declared as he got up from his chair.

It was about nine o'clock the following morning when Captain Crawley found the three boys sitting beneath the awning in the stern. With him was a young girl whose face, although a bit pale, was, as Jack afterward declared, the prettiest one he had ever seen.

"Irma, this is the brave boy that saved your life," the captain said as Bob rose from his chair.

The girl held out her hand and as Bob grasped it, she said: "I am very grateful."

"Please don't say anything more about it," Bob begged and hastened to introduce Jack and George.

"But—"

"Bob's awfully bashful," Jack interrupted her.

"But I do want you to know how I feel," she said in a low musical voice.

"I know all about it," Bob blushed.

"But you can't know it all," she insisted. "You see, I'm all daddy has and if I'd drowned he wouldn't have anyone to love him and—and—"

"And so it's mighty lucky that you didn't drown," Bob smiled.

"And you're all right this morning?" George asked.

"Except that I feel rather weak," she smiled.

"Of course you would," Jack assured her.

"The doctor says it'll be two or three days before I feel real strong again."

There were plenty of chairs and for an hour they sat and chatted and by the end of that time they all felt as though they had known each other for a long time. As if by mutual consent no one mentioned the terrible experience of yesterday.

"Now, Irma, dear, I think you'd better go lie down for a bit," the captain finally said. "You know, the doctor said you must be careful."

"All right, daddy," the girl said. "I'll see you all again at dinner."

"She's a peach, all right," Jack declared as soon as they had disappeared.

"She is pretty," Bob acknowledged.

"Pretty, she's beautiful," George corrected. "And she's as modest as she is pretty."

"Yep, they make 'em that way up in God's country," Jack laughed.

The rest of that day was torture to poor Bob. It seemed to him that everyone on the ship was determined to make a hero of him and he had to submit to compliments and congratulations until, finally, he locked himself in his stateroom and flatly refused to come out for three hours. But that evening, after they had sent and received "the picture" and Irma had gone to bed Captain Crawley told them all about the wreck.

"I can't tell you how Irma fell off the raft," he finished. "She was close by me one minute and the next minute she was gone. I thought I'd go crazy but some of the men kept me from jumping into the sea after her and of course it was the right thing to do for I never would have found her as we never caught a sight of her."

"Did you own the schooner?" Jack asked.

"No, only a third interest, but she was well insured so I won't lose much."

"That's good," George told him.

"It's the first vessel I ever lost and I've gone to sea ever since I was thirteen years old," the captain said.

"And how long have you been a captain?" Bob asked.

"Seventeen years."

"That's some record then."

Pleasant days followed and the boys were with their new friends almost continually. Captain Crawley they found all that George had declared him to be and, as for Irma, Jack summed it all up in two words "some girl."

Of course they showed her and the captain their picture machine and Jack printed, in large letters, a full account of the rescue and held the pages so that the folks at home could read them, all of which was, of course, very wonderful to them. Then, four days later they sighted a steamer bound for New York and she hove to long enough for Captain Crawley and his crew to be transferred. The boys were very sorry to see them go and Irma had tears in her blue eyes as she bade them good-by.

"But we're coming to see you when we get back home," Bob assured her.

"And I'll be more than glad to see you," she smiled through her tears.

"Cheer up, old man," Jack said putting his hand

on Bob's shoulder as he stood watching the big steamer as she slowly got under way again, "She isn't the first pretty girl you've said good-by to."

"And I'll bet she won't be the last either," George added.

"You two make me tired," Bob retorted.

Two days later they arrived at Tangier where they were to take on coal and other supplies. But, although the boys were in a great hurry to reach their destination, the time did not hang heavy as they were much interested in seeing the sights of the strange city. Sol, having been there several times, was an excellent guide and they saw more of the place than many would have in double the time. Then down the west coast of Africa the ship made its way and, as the miles slipped beneath them, their hearts beat with eager expectation.

Every night at nine o'clock they had a session with the folks at home and, to their great joy, the pictures had showed no appreciable indication of weakening.

"We must be all of six thousand miles from home and they seem as strong as ever," Bob said after they had signed off the night before they were to land at Loanda.

"Can't see a bit of difference," George agreed.

"It's sure remarkable," Sol added. "I had no idea it would work over so great a distance.

"Yep, they make 'em that way back in God's country," Jack grinned.

Many of the passengers had left the ship at Tangier and there were only a few who were to disembark at Loanda, the rest being booked through to Cape Town.

"The captain says we'll probably dock by five o'clock in the morning," Bob said shortly after ten o'clock.

"Which means that you want to get to bed, I reckon," Sol smiled.

"Well, I want to be up when we get there."

"Same here," Jack and George declared in the same breath.

"Then I reckon you'd better hit the hay," Sol advised. "I'm going out for a cigar but I'll try not to disturb you when I come in."

"No danger," Jack told him.

Ten minutes later all three boys were sound asleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICA

"COME, snap out of it, old man, we're in,"

"In what?" Bob asked sleepily.

"In Loanda, of course," Jack told him, as he gave him another shake.

"But it isn't five yet."

"Can't help that. We're in just the same."

Bob sprang from his berth and Jack stepped into the other stateroom to call George. Ten minutes later found all three out on deck where they found that *The Empress* had already tied up at the dock. Sol joined them half an hour later and told them that the cook had an early breakfast waiting for them.

"He's not going to stop here, you know," he explained and he wants to get away inside of an hour so as to get over the bar before the tide gets too low. Otherwise he'd have to wait for the next one.

So, inside of fifty minutes good-bys had been said and they were standing on the wharf waving farewell to *The Empress* as she steamed slowly out of the harbor.

"Now you boys stay right here and keep an eye on our stuff while I hunt up some one to take it up to the hotel," Sol said. "It's still pretty early for these birds around here as they are mostly more or less lazy and I wouldn't trust a lot of them as far's I can sling a cat."

"We'll stick," Bob promised him.

He was back in less than fifteen minutes in an old express wagon drawn by a horse which, Jack declared, looked older than the wagon. The driver, a small much wrinkled man looked, as Jack again declared, older than both of them put together.

They helped him put the stuff aboard and in a few minutes were ready to start.

"Guess we'd better walk," Sol suggested. "It's only a short distance."

"Then we'll be sure to get there," Jack grinned.

Loanda is a Portuguese settlement with an inhabitance of about 20,000 and the boys saw many things to attract their attention as they walked up the main street. As Sol had said the hotel, a fair sized wooden building, was only a few hundred yards from the wharf and soon they had registered and been assigned to two rooms on the second floor.

"Now the first thing to do is to see if we can learn anything about your uncle," Sol told them as soon as their luggage had been brought up. "And,

seeing that I know several people here, I reckon it's up to me."

"And you'd rather we wouldn't go with you?" Bob asked.

"Well, it's like this," Sol explained. "I'd like you to go with me all right, but every day counts and I believe I can do it quicker alone."

"I think you're right about that," George agreed. "We'd only be in the way."

"Then you put in the time looking about and I'll see what I can do."

He left them and soon the boys were ready for a stroll about the town. They returned shortly before eleven o'clock tired and hot and disgusted with the town. Sol was still absent and, after learning that dinner would not be ready for two hours, they decided to go to their rooms and take a nap.

Sol awoke them a little over an hour later and they knew from the look on his face that he was disappointed.

"I believe I've done all I can," he began. "Reckon I've interviewed twenty men but haven't learned much. Oh, I found several that remember him, and he left here with a crew of six blacks and one man remembered hearing him say that he was going up the Kongo to where the Sankuru empties into it and, after following that river, he intended branching off into the Kassai, and that was all he knew.

Then I found another man who said he'd heard a rumor about some trouble among some of the native tribes up that way, but I couldn't find a soul who had heard a word about him since he left."

"Then I reckon we'd better hit the trail as soon as possible, don't you think?" Bob asked.

"We start to-morrow morning at six o'clock," Sol told them.

"Where do we go from here?" Jack asked.

"I've hired a motor boat which will take us up the Kongo as far as the Sankuru and I've got four native scouts that I believe are good. It's a run of a little more than a hundred miles north to the mouth of the river and then it's a little over a hundred and fifty to the Sankuru. The owner of the boat says he will have us there sometime day after to-morrow afternoon."

"Then we'll go up the other river in our own collapsible canoes? Bob asked.

"That's the idea," Sol told them. "I've got four of them and they'll carry us all right."

They found the motor boat, a thirty foot craft, very broad of beam and with plenty of room, waiting for them at the wharf the next morning. Their four blacks, and they were very black indeed, were already aboard as was all their equipment, the latter having been taken down the night before. The captain and owner of the boat was a small Portuguese

of uncertain age who spoke English with but little accent. It was a beautiful morning and hardly a ripple disturbed the surface of the water as they swept out of the harbor and headed north.

The boat, the captain assured them could make better than ten miles an hour and, judging by the way she cut through the water, the boys decided that he was too conservative. They kept about a mile off shore all the forenoon and, when dinner time came, the captain set out a good lunch which he had provided.

They reached the mouth of the Kongo shortly after four o'clock and, making a broad sweep past the little town of Banana, started up the river. Numerous craft of all shapes and sizes were encountered in the next few miles and the boys found much to interest them. Shortly before six o'clock they reached a small town which the captain told them was called Matadi.

"I have to put in here to fill my tank with gasoline and here we stay all night," he told them.

"That's all right," Sol agreed.

"You sleep on board?" the captain asked.

"You got enough berths?" Sol asked.

"Got enough, yes."

"Then I guess we might's well. What do you say, boys?"

"Suits us," they assured him.

"Then we'll go ashore with the captain and get some supper and look about a bit and then come back," Sol suggested.

By this time the boat had been made fast to a floating wharf and, telling the captain they would be back around eight o'clock, Sol led the way up the single street, the boys following close at his heels.

"Is it safe to leave all our stuff there?" Bob asked anxiously as soon as they were out of hearing of the others.

"I reckon it'll be safe," Sol told him. "I've known Emanuel for several years and he picked out the blacks for me. He's as honest as the day is long. I know that."

They found a small eating house after a long search which, if not clean, was, at least, less dirty than the others they had looked into and decided to take a chance on it. To their surprise they found the food good and well cooked and all made a hearty meal. Then, having already covered the whole of the town, they returned to the boat and by nine o'clock were asleep in the little cabin. The captain and the blacks slept on the floor in the cockpit. They had, of course, brought the picture machine with them, but, acting on Sol's advice, they had, the last night on the ship, informed the folks at home that it might be several days before they would send again.

"A good many of these people, around where we're going, are scamps and it'll be a good plan to keep that machine in its case until we get well into the jungle," he had told them.

"Emanuel had breakfast ready for them shortly after daylight the next morning and, by six o'clock, they were off again. The current of the river was so slow that it was hardly preceptible and the boat made good time. Shortly before noon they stopped at Leopoldville, a fair sized town on the bank of the river, to permit Emanuel to again fill his gasoline tank as he told them he would be unable to get more until he returned.

"We pass no more town," he said.

"Can we get a good meal here?" Sol asked him.

"See that big house up there?" Emanuel pointed to a large white building, which towered above all the rest of the town, about a hundred yards from the river. "You get good food there and it be clean," he added.

"Then I guess we'd better try it," Sol suggested. "Goodness knows when we'll eat another civilized meal."

They reached the mouth of the Sankuru shortly before three o'clock and here the real journey was to begin. The boys had wondered why Sol had not engaged Emanuel to take them farther but, when they saw the Sankuru, they knew the reason. The

river was so filled with rocks and stumps of trees and other obstructions that nothing larger than a canoe would be of any use.

By half past three they had the stuff all unloaded and stacked on the shore and Emanuel was saying good-by to them.

"I hope you find him. He good man," was the last thing he said.

Two of the blacks could speak broken English but the other two did not know a word of the language although it was evident that they were bright enough for blacks. The two who knew the language were called Tom and Mat, names which they had assumed themselves when they learned to talk English. The others went under names more suited to their race. One, a big fellow standing well over six feet and as straight as an arrow, was Conch, and the other, a foot shorter but of powerful build, answered to the name of Kadja.

"We've got about four hours of daylight and I reckon we might as well be on our way as soon as we can get ready," Sol announced as he set about sorting out their goods.

It took nearly an hour to get the canoes set up and the supplies apportioned between them and it was five o'clock by the time they were ready to start. As the blacks were supposed to be expert with the paddle it was arranged that each of the

canoes should carry one white man and one black, the latter occupying the stern. The current was a little more rapid than that of the larger river but not rapid enough to make it difficult to make good progress. Bob had drawn Kadja as his mate and he found the fellow an expert in the handling of a canoe and, although they had been the last to start, it was not long before they were in the lead, although they had not passed the others at a pace fast enough to suggest anything in the nature of a race.

Shortly before seven o'clock Bob heard a grunt and, turning his head, saw Kadja pointing to a spot just ahead of them on the right bank of the river. From his gestures he judged that the black was trying to tell him that it would be a good place to camp for the night. So he nodded his head and Kadja at once turned the canoe toward the shore. The other canoes were only a short distance behind and reached the place almost as soon as they had landed.

"Good place you picked," Sol said as he stepped from his canoe.

"Kadja picked it out," Bob told him.

They had entered a thick jungle about an hour before and the spot was almost the first break they had seen. Here was an open space of about half an acre in which grew but three trees, so there was

plenty of room to pitch their light tents. The next few minutes proved that there had been no mistake made in the picking of their crew in so far as efficiency was concerned at least. The four black men at once set to work getting the camp ready for the night and getting supper. Bob and the other boys started in to help but Sol interfered.

"Let them do it. They won't understand it if we try to help and we'll lose cast in their estimation," he told them.

"But we're not used to sitting around with our hands in our pockets," Jack complained.

"Then you'll have to get used to it," Sol informed him. "These fellows like to do things in their own way and they're apt to get mad and light out if they're interfered with."

"All right, if that's the way of it," Jack gave in.

"How about a swim?" Bob proposed.

"Nothing doing," Sol declared.

"But the water looks clean enough," Bob argued.

"Oh, it's clean enough," Sol grinned, "but if you went in there you'd be lucky if you came out with all your legs."

"You mean—"

"Look out there," Sol pointed to a rough motionless object about twelve feet from the shore.

"What is it?" Jack asked. "Looks like a sunken

log to me although I don't remember seeing it when we came in."

"That's because it wasn't there then," Sol grinned.

"Then it's an alligator," George suggested.

"It's a crocodile," Sol told them, "and, believe me, they're worse than any gator that ever lived."

"He's probably waiting to see if we're going in swimming," Jack laughed.

"Which we ain't," Bob added.

"You said a mouthful," George declared.

Just then the reptile moved slightly and opened his mouth showing the hugh teeth.

"No thanks, I prefer to stay outside," Jack laughed.

"I'd sure hate to meet that fellow on a dark night," Bob declared.

"And, thank goodness, that's one thing they don't make up in God's country," George added.

Supper was ready in a surprisingly short time and, after they had eaten they all voted it an excellent one. They had but two tents and they were large enough to accommodate but two persons each. But Sol had already explained to them that the blacks always slept out in the open.

"You couldn't get one of those fellows to sleep in a tent if you had a dozen of them," he had told them.

As they planned to be off by daybreak they were asleep soon after supper. The boys had been a bit timid at first about going to sleep in the depths of the jungle but Sol assured them that there was not the slightest danger as the blacks would be outside the tents and would know should any wild animal approach.

"They're the lightest sleepers you ever saw," he told them, "and nothing will get near this camp without their knowledge."

Sometime in the night Bob awoke, an unusual occurrence with him for he was a sound sleeper and seldom awoke during the night unless there was a reason for it. For some minutes he lay awake wondering what had disturbed him. He and Jack were in the same tent and he could hear his brother's deep breathing and knew that, whatever it was, it had not awakened him. Then, just as he was about to turn over and go to sleep again concluding that he must have woke of his own accord, he heard a heavy crashing in the jungle which sounded but a short distance away.

"What was that?" Jack whispered.

"You heard it?"

"Must have. Something woke me."

Again came the sound and now it was nearer than before.

"Sounds like something big," Bob whispered.

"It's darker than pitch out," Jack said as he pulled the flap of the tent aside.

"Maybe it's an elephant," Bob suggested.

"Might be," Jack agreed.

"Think we'd better go out?"

"I guess the blacks'll let us know if there's any danger."

"I don't hear them moving about."

"Nor I, but that isn't saying they aren't."

All the time they could hear the crashing of brush coming nearer and nearer and then, all of a sudden, the sound ceased and for a moment there was silence. Then it began again but now it was evident that, whatever it was that was making the noise, was retreating. Fainter and fainter grew the sound and soon ceased altogether.

"Well, I guess it didn't like us," Bob sighed.

"For which many thanks," Jack added.

The boys talked in whispers for some minutes and then fell asleep again and did not awake until Sol called them. It was still dark but Bob's watch told him that it was half past three and the odor of coffee assured him that breakfast was in the making.

"Did you hear anything in the night?" he asked Sol as he sprang from his blanket.

"Heard an elephant wandering round."

"That's what it was then?" Jack asked.

"Were you scared?" Sol asked him.

"Sure was," Jack told him without hesitation.

"Well, I don't blame you, but you needn't have been. They're more scared of you than you are of them unless you attack them."

All that day they paddled up the river which in places was fully a hundred yards wide and in others less than a quarter of that width. The jungle grew close to the water's edge on both sides and so thick that they were unable to see more than a few feet beyond the banks. They saw many of the huge crocodiles some fully twenty-five feet long and with mouths which, as Jack declared, seemed big enough to take in two or three men at a gulp. Strange birds flew over their heads and, now and then, a huge water snake would glide along the surface of the water.

"I'll never be tempted to go in swimming in here," Bob declared when they made a short stop for dinner on a small island in the middle of the river.

"The temptation simply doesn't exist, if you ask me," George laughed.

That night they camped on a small island and save for the cries of night birds and the splash, now and then, of an inquisitive crocodile, their sleep was undisturbed. Since noon of that day the boys had noted that they were getting into a more hilly country and soon after starting the next morning, they were

paddling between high hills whose sides came down to the edge of the river. The current was now more rapid as the stream narrowed and their progress was correspondingly slower. In the middle of the forenoon, they had to make a carry of several hundreds yards around rapids which were far too swift to be traversed. It was a hard task getting the canoes and supplies through the forest which thickly covered the sides of the hills and it was well after three o'clock before they were ready to start off again.

"Here's hoping we don't strike many of that kind," Bob said as he mopped the sweat from his face.

"We'll hit two more before we get to the end of this river," Sol told him.

"As bad as that one?" Jack asked.

"One of them's worse."

"There ain't no such animal," Jack laughed.

But he found that Sol was right when, two days later, they worked for seven hours moving the canoes and supplies a distance of not more than two hundred yards around a small falls. Although the distance was small the side of the hill, coming down close to the river's edge, was so steep and rocky that it was literally a case of working foot by foot. Even so, it was plainly evident that many had preceeded them over the course.

"What do you think about that animal what you said wasn't?" Bob laughed as he and Jack stood waiting for the blacks to bring up the last load of stuff.

"I take it all back," Jack grinned mopping his face for they had worked fully as hard as their blacks, Sol explaining that it was all right in a case of that sort, "but any work around camp they want their own way about," he had finished.

Since they had started in the canoes they had not seen a single human being outside their own party and, while they were eating supper, the night following the last carry, Bob asked Sol about it.

"Aren't there any people in this part of the world?"

"Some," Sol replied soberly.

"Why don't we see anyone, then?" Jack asked, somewhat surprised at Sol's tone.

For a full minute he did not answer and, for the first time, the boys were conscious of a look of worry on his face.

"I wish I could tell you," he finally said. "Ordinarily we would have passed a number of canoes on this river and their total absence is something that I don't understand. It's got Tom and Mat worried too," he added after another pause.

"Have they said anything about it?" George asked.

"Yes."

"And don't they know what it means?" Bob asked.

"They say they don't."

"But don't you have an idea?" Bob asked.

"Only a guess. You see, there are a number of tribes not far back in the hills and usually they are on good terms with each other and do more or less visiting back and forth, and it may be that they're having a scrap of some kind."

"Among themselves, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, if they are, here's hoping we don't get mixed up in it," Jack declared.

But they were not to go much farther without seeing some one for, shortly after they had started the following morning, on rounding a sharp bend in the river, they met a large canoe carrying a half dozen natives. It happened that the river was very narrow at that point and Bob's canoe, which, as usual, was leading, was within a few feet of the other when they sighted it. The natives were evidently much surprised to see a white man and, as the two canoes drifted closer together, Bob could tell that they were talking rapidly among themselves. He turned his head to see how Kadja was taking it but the black displayed no emotion on his stolid face. Then, as the two canoes almost came together, the

native in the bow reached out his hand and grasped the end of Bob's canoe, and immediately the native's canoe swung in toward shore and, a moment later, grounded on the bank. But, before they could disembark, the canoe carrying Sol and Tom, came into view around the bend, closely followed by the others. When the natives saw that there were more in the party than the two in the first canoe they jabbered excitedly for a moment while the other canoes were drawing up to the bank. Then they met them with obvious signs of friendship. They were good sized men and were naked save a dirty loin cloth and, as Bob afterward confided to Jack, had the ugliest mugs he'd ever seen on a human being.

"See if you can talk with them," Sol said to Tom.

The black tried two dialects without succees but with the third attempt the leader's face lit up, and he answered in the same language.

"Good," Sol grunted. "Ask him who they are."

"Them tribe live down river," Tom told them after he had put the question to them.

"Ask him if there's any trouble among any of the tribes."

"Him say no."

"I'll bet he's lying," Sol whispered to Bob who was standing close beside him. "Now ask him if they've seen a white man anywhere during the last

year, one that was the only white in the party and about fifty years old."

Tom put the question and the leader consulted with the others of his party before making reply. Then he shook his head and the others did the same.

"Him say no white man been up the river for two year," Tom interpreted.

"Tell him he's—" Sol stopped before finishing the sentence and substituted: "Tell him he can go."

"Tough looking bunch of humanity," Jack declared as soon as the canoe had disappeared around the bend.

"And they're as tough as they look," Sol assured them."

"Heap bad," Mat declared.

"Do you think they intended to harm us?" Bob asked.

"Well, I'm glad we were near," Sol told him.

"Them steal all them get hands on," Tom assured them.

"They sure looked capable of it," George added.

"We'll have to keep our eyes open from now on," Sol said as they pushed off.

"You think they'll follow us?" Bob asked.

"You never can tell. I hardly think they will as we're eight to their six, but they may have some more of their tribe near."

"I didn't see that they were armed," George stated as they were pushing off.

"They probably had their blowpipes in the canoe," Sol told him.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEARS AND RUMORS

THREE days later they reached the head of navigation even for a canoe and Tom informed them that they would not strike another river until they had traveled for at least a week. They had seen nothing more of the six natives although they had kept a close watch. Neither had they seen anyone else, a fact that seemed to cause their blacks no little uneasiness. Another thing which puzzled them was the absence of wild animals. Not since they had started had they seen anything larger than a fair sized monkey with the exception of the crocodiles.

"Of course it may be only a coincidence," Sol told them, "but ordinarily we'd have seen plenty of natives and plenty of big game as well by this time."

"Well, we heard one elephant anyhow," Jack declared.

It was about three o'clock when Tom told them that they could go no further by canoe and Sol at once announced that they would camp there for the night.

"It'll take some time to get the canoes packed and the rest of the stuff in shape to tote," he said

"And we might as well get to sleep early and be ready for an early start in the morning."

"It seems to me that we stand mighty little chance of finding Uncle Si in this wilderness," Jack confided to Bob and George a little later as they were waiting for Tom to call them to supper.

Sol took his pipe from his mouth and, for a moment looked at the speaker as though undecided what to say.

"Aren't getting discouraged, are you?" he finally asked.

"Of course not," Jack replied stoutly. "But, honest injun, do you think there is any chance of finding him?"

"Honest injun, I do," Sol grinned.

"And where do we go from here?" Bob asked.

"Well, it's been a wonder to me all along that you boys haven't been more inquisitive about where we're going, but, now that you've asked me, I'm going to tell you. We're heading for a little lake about six hundred miles north east of where we are now."

"Why there?" Bob asked as he paused.

"Because I believe your uncle is there."

"What makes you think so?" Jack asked.

"While we were coming up the Kongo Emanuel told me that he had heard a rumor that a white man was being held captive by a tribe which lives on the shore of that lake. I haven't said anything about it

before because I didn't want to give you any false hope. Of course it's only a chance. All sorts of rumors float around regarding the jungle but it's the only clue I've hit and I think it's our best bet."

"Of course it is," Jack agreed heartily.

"What's the name of the lake?" George asked.

"It hasn't any name on the map but Emanuel said the natives call it Oomsat."

"What's it mean?" Bob asked.

"I don't know," Sol confessed. "Probably doesn't mean anything particular. A lot of the names which the natives use don't."

"Do you think our black boys are acting all right?" Bob suddenly asked Sol.

"You mean—?"

"Seems to me they're acting strange like, not the same fellows they were when we started," Bob interrupted.

"Well, as I told you the other day, there's something a bit strange about the lack of men and beasts, and these blacks are as superstitious a lot as ever lived. The least thing out of the ordinary and they're away up in the air. I imagine it's only a coincidence that we've seen no game but, I'll confess, I'm beat when it comes to the other part of it."

"You mean the natives?" Jack asked.

"The lack of them, yes."

"You don't think they're likely to desert us, do you?" Bob inquired.

It was a full minute before Sol replied to the question.

"That's what's worrying me," he finally confessed. "I know those four are brave fellows, at least Emanuel told me they were and I'll bank on what he says, and they'll face most anything they can understand but, when it comes to something they can't see through—well, I'm not so sure."

Just then one of the blacks beat on the bottom of a pan as a signal that supper was ready and they had no further chance to discuss the situation for the present. Bob, although he had known the explorer only a short time, had come to have a great respect for him, and the idea that he was worried over the turn things had taken caused him no little anxiety. He knew Sol was not a man to worry without cause, and, all through the meal he watched the blacks as closely as he dared. But he was forced to acknowledge to himself that he could detect nothing of a suspicious nature in their conduct. Perhaps they were a bit more quiet than usual but that could easily be attributed to fatigue as they had had a hard day paddling the canoes up the narrow stream which, for the last few miles had been quite swift. And besides, they had worked very hard since landing in getting the camp arranged for the

night and packing the supplies ready for the early start the following morning.

"How about setting a watch on them to-night?" he suggested at a moment when they were not near. "It seems to me that if they intend to clear out they're likely to do it to-night."

"Wouldn't do a mite of good," Sol assured him. "If they've made up their minds to go they'll go in spite of all we can do. I know them well enough to know that."

The place where they were camping was in a dense part of the jungle. Indeed, as Jack put it, it was all dense. They were in a ravine between two lofty hills and the stream, up which they had paddled, had narrowed until it was but a few feet wide and the trees and undergrowth grew close to its edge and much work with machetes, heavy broad bladed knives, had been necessary to clear a space large enough for pitching the tents. This condition, Bob easily understood, bore out Sol's statement that they would be powerless to prevent the blacks taking French leave if they so intended. Even should they all sit up all night, they could easily slip away without their being aware of it unless they kept close enough to them to touch them and that, of course, was out of the question.

"Just the same I hate to let them get away without doing anything to prevent it," Bob whispered

to Jack after they had stretched out in their tent a little later.

"Oh, well, what's the use of hanging crêpe? Probably they have no idea of leaving," Jack whispered back.

"Maybe not, but I've got a hunch all right," Bob retorted.

"And I've got one that I'm not going to worry about it but am going to sleep." And it was not many minutes before his regular breathing told Bob that that hunch at least was in good working order.

But it was long before he lost himself in slumber. It seemed so wrong for them not to do anything to prevent what would be little short of a catastrophe to their hopes of finding their uncle when they had good reason to believe that it was going to happen. And yet, for the life of him, he couldn't think of a thing to do. So he turned first on one side and then on the other listening all the while. But finally, after he had looked at his watch for at least the tenth time and it had told him that it was nearly eleven o'clock, he slept. Then, suddenly, he was wide awake again and felt that he had slept only a few minutes. What had disturbed him? He was not conscious of having heard any sound and now, save for the gentle sough of the branches as the trees swayed in the light wind, all was silent. And yet, something had happened. How he knew it he

could not have explained but he was sure of it.

Five minutes passed while he strained his ears and then, unable to endure the suspense any longer, he rolled carefully out of his blanket and crept softly to the entrance of the tent. Drawing aside the flap which closed the opening he stuck out his head and strained his eyes. But there was no moon and beneath the thick trees the light of the stars was futile and it was so dark that he could not see three feet away. For a moment he hesitated while he listened. But there was no sound. He knew that the four blacks had chosen a spot beneath a large tree about twenty feet from the tent for their "bedroom" as they had thrown themselves there before he had gone to bed. On his hands and knees he began to move toward the place careful not to make the slightest noise as he knew how keen were their ears.

He judged that he had covered about half the distance to the tree when the sound of whispers caught his ears. Yes, they were whispering but he was too far away to catch any words. So he slowly drew his body along the ground until he knew that he was only a few feet from them.

"It time we go," were the first words he made out.

"Plenty soon," was the reply.

Then came more words in the native language

which, of course, he did not understand. For perhaps ten minutes he lay there and listened catching a sentence now and then but missing the greater part of the conversation. But, from what he did get, he judged that three of the men wanted to leave while the fourth was minded to stick. That one, he was pretty certain, was Tom.

"Me go now," he heard Mat say in a tone which carried conviction.

A grunt of approval from one of the others followed and there was a movement as though they were getting to their feet. Bob's first impulse was to make his presence known to them and to try and persuade them to stay. But, before he could put the thought into execution, Tom's voice caused him to wait.

"Me make prayer to Great Spirit. Him no say stay, me go too."

Followed a weird incantation in the native tongue and then silence. Then, from the depths of the jungle came a sepulchral voice at first so faint that it was hardly audible, then increasing until its volume seemed to fill the space for a great distance. Not that it was loud but its carrying power seemed enormous.

"Stay-stay-stay-stay-stay." Five times the word was spoken then—"Stay by the white men. The Great Spirit orders it. Stay."

Bob could hear the black men as they caught their breath and then, as the voice died away, he listened.

"We stay," he heard Tom say.

"We stay," Mat repeated, and, although he could not understand what the others said, it was evident that they were all of a mind. So, as softly as he had come, he crept back to his tent and was soon fast asleep.

"Well, they didn't go after all," Sol said the next morning as Bob and Jack joined him, shortly after daylight, by the bank of the stream where he and George were washing.

"They seem to be here all right," Bob grinned.

"And I believe they'll stick now," Sol told them. "But I'd have bet my last dollar last night that they were going to bolt."

"Any of you hear anything in the night?" Jack asked.

"I didn't," George told him.

"Neither did I," Sol declared.

"Well, I reckon I must have been dreaming," Jack explained, "but I thought I heard something talking in a kind of a strange voice that sounded a good ways off. What you laughing at?" he suddenly asked Bob.

"I reckon you weren't dreaming," Bob told him.

"Then you heard it?"

"Sure."

"I thought it said stay several times."

"It did."

"Say, what are you trying to do, kid me?" Jack growled.

"Not for the world," Bob grinned.

"Then what is it?"

Then Bob told them of his adventure of the night and how, making use of his ability as a ventriloquist, he had seen to it that Tom received an answer to his prayer.

"I hated like the dickins to make a mockery of his religion but it seemed to me that it was the only way," he finished.

"And you did just right," Sol assured him.

"I'll say you did, and I don't mean maybe," Jack added.

"It's their duty to stick to their job," Sol declared, "and the deception won't hurt them a mite. But I've got to hand it to you that you're one smart boy all right. If it hadn't been for you we'd be alone here right now and, let me tell you, it would have been no picnic."

"I'll say it wouldn't," George agreed.

"And you think we don't need to worry about them any more?" Jack asked.

"You couldn't drive 'em away now," Sol assured him.

Breakfast was soon over and before six o'clock

they were started on their long tramp through the dense jungle. The greater part of the supplies and equipment was carried by the blacks but the others had each a light load strapped to his back. For a mile or more the going was fairly easy although there was nothing resembling a trail. Then the undergrowth became thicker and the trees closer together until, in less than an hour after they had started, they were making very slow progress.

"At this rate I reckon it'll take us about ten years to get there," Jack declared as he stopped a moment to wipe the sweat from his face.

"It is a bit heavy going," Bob acknowledged.

"Yes, quite a bit," George added sarcastically.

The four blacks were going ahead and, with their machetes were, to a certain extent, clearing the way of the undergrowth so that it was not as hard for them to follow as it otherwise would have been. But, long before noon the boys were chafing at their slow progress.

"We ought to have come in flying machines," Jack grumbled as they stopped for lunch by the side of a small spring.

"Fat chance we'd have had to land anywhere," Bob reminded him.

"But I reckon we could have landed on that lake where we are going," Jack retorted.

"Maybe."

After lunch they rested for an hour and then started off again in somewhat better spirits for Sol had told them that they would strike places where traveling would be much easier. But such a place did not come that day and, when they finished the day's march a little after six o'clock, Sol was obliged to acknowledge that they had probably not covered more than fifteen miles.

"But we've got to be content with the knowledge that we're doing the best we can," he told them.

The next day they found the going a bit easier and covered nearly twenty-five miles and were somewhat encouraged. They had seen no large game as yet but, shortly after noon Bob had shot a wild turkey and the bird made an agreeable change in their menu. Small monkeys were numerous and all day long they had scolded and chattered from the trees over their heads. They had also seen a number of snakes, two of them more than fifteen feet long, but they had wriggled rapidly out of their way and, as none of them believed in killing even a snake just for the sake of killing, they had made no effort to shoot them. Fortunately they found that springs of splendid water were numerous so they were not obliged to carry any supply with them.

It was shortly after noon, on the fourth day after they had left the river, that they saw the first large beast. They were, at the time, passing through a

space more open than any they had so far encountered and Jack, who was bringing up the rear, heard a low but angry sounding growl off to his right. At first he could see nothing but, an instant later, out from behind a huge tree, leaped a hairy form which he instantly recognized as a gorilla. The others were some distance ahead and evidently had not heard the sound. When the gorilla came into view it was not more than thirty feet from where Jack was standing and, for an instant, boy and ape stood and looked at each other. Jack had already taken the rifle, which he carried slung across his back, in his hands and was waiting to see what were the intentions of the animal for he did not wish to shoot unless it was necessary.

But the instant he started to move away from his position the gorilla, with a spiteful snarl started after him beating his hairy breast with its long arms and baring its huge tusks. Then Jack knew that the beast meant business and, raising his rifle to his shoulder, he waited until it was about twelve feet away and pulled the trigger. But, to his horror there was no report and, realizing that it meant death to be caught, he turned and started to run. But, although he was a fast runner and the ground was fairly smooth and free of undergrowth, his speed was no match for that of his enemy which had dropped onto all fours and the boy knew that

it was only a matter of seconds when he would be caught. He glanced ahead and his heart failed him when he saw that there was no one in sight.

"Bob."

He shouted at the top of his voice as he ran but there was no reply. Then his foot caught on a root and he fell headlong. He knew, as he went down, that the gorilla was close on his heels and gave himself up for lost. But, at that instant, the sharp crack of a rifle shattered the silence of the forest and he heard the whine of the bullet as it passed only a short distance over his head. Followed a grunt and a crash as the huge beast fell to the ground and the next thing Jack knew some one was sopping water on his forehead.

"What—what—" he began, but Bob, in a low tone, told him to take it easy.

So he closed his eyes and lay still for a few moments while strength flowed back into his body.

"Reckon I fainted," he whispered, as he again opened his eyes.

"Reckon you did," Bob told him.

He saw that all the party were standing about him.

"Just like a girl," he muttered.

"Girl your eye," George replied. "It's a wonder you didn't die of fright with that thing after you."

"Who shot it?" he asked as he sat up.

"Bob," George told him.

"Then I reckon he saved my life."

"I reckon he did."

"I heard you yell and turned back just as you fell," Bob explained. "It was a lucky shot."

"For me," Jack grinned.

"But why didn't you shoot?" Sol asked.

"Gun missed fire."

"The deuce you say," Sol muttered as he picked up the rifle which lay a few feet from where Jack had fallen. "Shell stuck," he declared after an examination.

"And it came near being a costly stick," George said.

"And I don't mean perhaps," Bob added.

"I never knew a shell to stick in one of those guns before," Sol declared as he finally got the shell out and looked closely at it.

"What made it stick?" Bob asked.

"I'm trying to find out," Sol told him.

"It looks to me as though it was longer than it ought to be," George declared as he took it in his hand. "And it is," he announced an instant later after he had compared it with another.

"So 'tis," Sol agreed. "No wonder it stuck."

"And it isn't enough longer so that a body would be likely to notice it in loading," Bob declared.

"I reckon we'd better go over them pretty care-

fully after this before we load," Sol suggested. "There may be other long ones."

"You bet that's what I'm going to do," Jack promised as he got to his feet. "My, but he's an ugly looking fellow, isn't he?" he said as he stepped to where the gorilla was stretched out on the ground.

"And I don't think I ever saw one much larger," Sol told them.

"He's big enough anyway," Jack grinned.

"Him heap big," Tom declared shaking his woolly head.

"We'd better all empty our rifles and examine our shells while we're waiting for Jack to get his strength back. We don't want a thing like that to happen again," Sol told them as he began to take the shells from the magazine of his rifle.

"You don't have to wait for me," Jack said, "but your idea is a good one all right."

They rested for an hour, in spite of Jack's protestations that he was all right, before starting off again and, during the time, they examined about a hundred shells but did not find another long one.

"To think that out of all those shells the only long one should be in my gun at just that time," Jack said.

"That's the way things happen in this life," Sol told him. "And it's wonderful, when you come to think of it, the number of narrow escapes we have

from serious injury and death. Surely God watches over us and, before we start, I move we thank Him for speeding Bob's bullet to the right spot."

So the four white men knelt there in the jungle and Sol made a short but fervent prayer while the blacks stood with bowed heads knowing that the white man was praying to his God.

The traveling continued good all the rest of the day and, when they stopped for the night, by the side of a small brook, Sol declared that they had covered not less than thirty-five miles since morning.

"Not bad for the jungle," he concluded.

CHAPTER SIX

AN AIR DETOUR

It was still early the following morning and they had not gone more than a mile when they came upon the first elephants they had encountered. They had been going down a gentle slope and the jungle had been getting more and more dense as they continued until it was nearly as bad as any they had met with. Then, suddenly, they came into a large open space and, as the blacks stopped and held up their hands as a signal, they saw, not more than a hundred yards away, a herd of six elephants. They were to windward of the huge beasts and they had not scented them and, for several minutes they stood and watched them as they fed. Three were tuskers and the boys thought they were far larger than any they had ever seen in a circus.

"What'll they do when they see us?" Bob whispered.

"They'll run," Sol told him.

"From little weuns?" Jack grinned.

"You bet," Sol whispered.

"You try um shot?" one of the blacks whispered to Sol.

"No. We've no time to take care of it in case we should kill one and I don't believe in killing just for fun," he replied much to the disgust of the black man.

Just then one of the tuskers, the largest one, raised his trunk and sounded a shrill note of alarm and the boys laughed aloud and the huge beasts almost tumbled over each other in their haste to get away.

"They look clumsy enough for a fact," Sol told them as they started again, "but let one of them get after you and you'd be surprised at the speed with which he can get over the ground. I'll tell you about the time one of them got after me some time. And he almost got me," he added dryly.

For some time they continued to go down hill and the boys noticed that the ground was constantly getting softer and, every now and then, water would fill the prints left by their feet.

"Looks to me like we're getting into a swamp of some kind," Bob said to Jack, who was immediately in front of him.

"Just what I've been thinking," Jack replied.

A few rods further and they came up with Sol and the blacks who had stopped on the edge of what looked like a large lake except that huge trees grew closely together their trunks rising from the water as far as they could see, although that was not very far.

"Looks like a detour," George declared.

"The trouble is that it may stretch for miles," Sol told him.

"How about using the canoes?" Jack asked.

"No good," Sol assured him. "Trees are to close together and we'd be almost sure to rip a hole in them before we'd gone any distance at all."

"What's to be done, then?" Bob asked.

"White men stay here, me see," Tom broke in, and before they could question him regarding his plan, he had leaped into the branches of a tree and, a moment later, had disappeared out over the water.

"Tarzan stuff," Jack laughed.

"Him heap good," Mat assured them.

Tom returned in about twenty minutes.

"Not far," he announced as he dropped to the ground.

"Think we can make it?" Sol asked him.

Tom looked at the boys for an instant before he answered. "You boys good climb?" he asked.

"I reckon," Bob told him.

"Then we mak' him. We carry half stuff then come back for all and you, eh."

"But we can carry some," Jack objected.

"Better do as Tom says," Sol advised, and they made no further objection.

The four blacks, after fastening the loads securely to their backs, were off and were gone for all of a half hour.

"Heap harder with load," Mat said as he dropped silently to the ground.

"I'll bet it is," Jack agreed.

Soon they were loaded again and now Tom told them to follow and to be careful and not miss their footing.

"It not hard you go slow," he declared.

"Do your stuff," Jack sang out as he swung himself into the branches of the first tree.

All three boys were good climbers but they had been worried, although they had said nothing, about how Sol would find it doing Tarzan stuff, as Jack had put it. But they soon found the older man well able to take care of himself even in the trees. The branches were large and the trees grew so closely together that they interlocked in such a way that it was not very difficult to pass from one to the other and the boys were beginning to think it a great lark.

They were following one behind the other with the blacks in the lead and had covered some distance when Bob, who was between Jack and George, stepped onto a limb which he thought was the one George had just stepped off of. There was a sharp crack and Jack looked up just in time to see his brother's body drop like a stone into the water below. It was a fall of not over twenty feet and, as he had many times dived a much greater distance, he did not, at first, feel any alarm. But when a full

minute passed and Bob did not reappear, he became frightened. George, who was in the next tree, had also heard the crack and he too was watching the water below. Sol and the blacks were too far ahead to be aware of what had happened.

"Why doesn't he come up?" George called.

"I'm going to find out," Jack called back, and before the other could say a word, he had plunged headfirst from the limb.

When Bob felt the limb give way under his feet he tried to grab hold of the higher branch of which he had just let go. But the snap came so suddenly he failed and, as there happened to be no other branches directly beneath him, the next thing he knew the water had closed over his head. He struck feet first and hardly had his head disappeared before his feet hit bottom. Not at all alarmed as yet he at once struck out with both arms, but to his dismay, he found that he was unable to budge. His feet had gone for some distance into the muddy bottom of the lake and were held there as if in a vise by the clinging ooze. Then he tried to work first one foot up and then the other but, the more he tried the more he sank and a feeling of dread filled his mind. He was good at holding his breath and had many times stayed under water for as long as two minutes but that was when he went under with his lungs full of air. But now he had had no time to

fill his lungs and he realized that the contest would soon come to an end. He tried letting his body down until he was lying flat on the mud but even then he was unable to free his feet. The muddy ooze stuck like glue and the more he struggled the more firmly he seemed held.

And now his lungs were beginning to hurt and he knew the end was near. Once more he stood up straight and tried to free himself. But it was useless and finally he gave himself up for lost. But, just before he lost consciousness, he felt his body grasped from behind and pulled backward. Realizing that help had come and, summoning the last ounce of his remaining strength, he worked his feet up and down. It was a desperate struggle beneath the water, but the help Jack was giving proved sufficient to overcome the hold of the mud and, just as it seemed as though his lungs would burst, his head shot above the water. Eagerly he gulped in the air while Jack held his head above the surface.

"Take it easy, old fellow," he cried.

"I'll be—be all right—in a—minute," Bob gasped.

By this time Jack had grabbed hold of a branch which fortunately grew close down to the surface and George reached down and grasped Bob. In another minute he had drawn him onto the limb and was holding him tight.

"My, but you gave me a scare," he gasped.

"Pretty close shave," Bob smiled weakly.

"What's wrong back there?"

Sol was calling from the branches of a tree a few feet off.

"Bob fell into the drink," Jack called back.

"You look slightly damp yourself," Sol declared.

"He jumped in after him," George explained and proceeded to give him an account of the accident.

"And if it hadn't been for Jack I'd be down there yet," Bob added as he finished. "That mud's the stickiest stuff I ever got stuck in."

"Are you all right now?" Sol inquired.

"Sure."

"Then let's get going. I was almost across when I missed you."

The blacks had not turned back with Sol and they found them waiting when, a few minutes later, they reached the other side of the strange lake. The day was very warm, hot in fact, and Bob and Jack decided that it would not be worth while to change their clothes although they did stop long enough to put on dry shoes and socks. Before starting on again they once more thanked God for His care.

Almost immediately on leaving the shore of the lake they began to go up hill and, although the slope was gradual it made traveling hard as the undergrowth was very thick.

"Seconds are always thirds, you know," George

told them as they stopped for a short rest about an hour later.

"Meaning?" Bob asked.

"Jack had his narrow escape and you've had yours," George explained. "That makes two, doesn't it?"

"I reckon," Jack replied, "but I don't take any stock in that kind of bunk."

"Neither do I," Sol broke in. "But we can't be any too careful in the jungle where dangers lurk on all sides." His face was very sober as he spoke and all agreed that he was right.

No more adventurers were encountered that day and they camped early on the bank of a small brook as they were all thoroughly tired, the way having led up hill for the greater part of the time.

That night, after a short consultation, they decided to broadcast. So nine o'clock found them with the machine set up just outside the tents. The four blacks had watched with open mouths while the boys were getting ready but, as was their custom, they had asked no questions. The screen was stretched across the front of one of the tents and for ten minutes they stood in front of the machine going through antics which must have raised a question in the minds of the amazed blacks regarding their sanity.

Then Jack switched on the receiving set and for

a moment they all stood and stared at the screen. But they had not long to wait for almost at once Mr. Lakewood's smiling face sprang into view quickly followed by the other members of the family.

"Distance doesn't seem to count at all," Jack whispered.

"It sure is good," Bob agreed.

"Wonderful," Sol declared.

"Who dem?"

None of the blacks had said a word until the "show" was over and then Tom asked the question in an awed tone as though he were committing a crime.

"They were the father, mother and sister of Bob and Jack," Sol told him.

"Where they am?" Tom asked in a husky whisper.

"In America, several thousand miles from here."

"But them move."

"Yes."

"Them be here?"

"No. It was only a picture," Sol explained.

"Picture no move," the black insisted shaking his woolly head.

"Some do," Sol smiled, and then he tried to explain, as well as he could, the principal of the moving picture. But it was evident that the blacks did

not understand it at all although they listened intently.

"Hope it didn't scare them too much," Bob said after they had withdrawn.

"It got them guessing all right," Sol told him. "But I don't think it will do any harm."

"Evidently they had never seen a movie before," George said.

"Not they," Sol assured them.

"Tom hated like poison to ask that question," Jack chuckled.

"I reckon he did," Sol agreed.

"But he simply couldn't keep it in," Bob laughed.

"How much did we cover to-day?" George asked turning to Sol.

"I doubt if we made more than twenty miles."

"And it seemed like a hundred," Jack groaned.

When they awoke the next morning it was raining hard and Sol advised against starting.

"We'd be soaked through before we'd gone a hundred feet," he told them. "And we would cover enough ground to pay for the hard work of traveling in the rain. No, I think we'll make better time in the end to wait awhile and see if it doesn't let up. I don't think it's going to rain all day."

Although the delay was irksome to the boys they recognized the truth of his argument and quickly agreed with him.

"I wonder if there's any fish in that brook," Jack said as soon as they had finished breakfast.

"Ought to be," Sol told him.

"Well, I'm going to find out."

Jack had brought a short jointed rod and it took him but a few minutes to get it out and ready.

"What'll I use for bait?" he asked Sol. "It's too thick to use flies."

"Reckon you ought to find some worms most anywhere," Sol told him. "I never was in a country where you couldn't find 'em although I don't know's I ever tried it in Africa."

Jack borrowed a strong spoon from Tom and started digging. It was not much of a shovel but was the best the camp afforded.

"There may be places in Africa where worms are thick but it's not in this part of it," he grumbled a little later. But just then he captured one skinny angle worm about an inch in length and this gave him renewed hope and he persisted with the result that, after a half hour of hard work, he had six worms all about the size of the first.

"Not so good but better than nothing," he grinned as he returned the spoon.

It was still raining hard but he had on his slicker and so did not mind it. The brook was a small one, not more than three or four feet wide for the most part, but he knew that good sized trout are

caught in very small streams in Maine and hoped that African trout might be no more particular.

"Don't go too far away," Sol advised him as he passed his tent.

"And don't let the fish pull you into the drink," Bob, who was standing in the opening of his tent, added.

"I won't to both suggestions," Jack laughed.

A few yards above the camp he found a likely looking pool and, after carefully baiting his hook with one of the small worms, he crept softly up and dropped it in the water. To his disappointment nothing happened and, after waiting a moment, he moved farther up the brook in search of another pool.

A second try brought no results and he about decided that there were no fish in the brook. But he was a boy who disliked to be beaten and he hated to go back to camp empty handed. So he sought still another pool and, to his great satisfaction, the next one yielded two trout each weighing well over a pound.

"Not half bad," he said half aloud as he rebaited his hook and moved to another spot which he could see some twenty feet farther up.

This pool also gave up two trout only slightly smaller than the others, and he gleefully rebaited his hook with one of his two remaining worms.

"Two more'll make a dandy meal for us," he thought as he stepped back into the woods.

He had reached another likely looking spot and was about to cast his line when, suddenly, he was seized from behind and a hard hand was pressed over his mouth. So sudden was the attack that he had no chance to defend himself for no sooner was his head pulled back than another man caught hold of his feet and he was carried swiftly into the jungle. He knew that it was useless to struggle so he wisely kept still. He did try to yell but the hand over his mouth was pressed so tightly that he could make hardly a sound. But his ears were open and, although his head was held in such a way that he could see no one, he knew that there were several in the party that had attacked him. The fish and the rod had been snatched from his hands and he did not know what had become of them. It was strange, as he thought of it afterward, but, at the moment, his chief concern was the loss of the fish.

He was carried in this manner for, he judged, about three hundred yards before he was put on his feet, and he was enabled to look about him, although the hand was still held over his mouth. There were four natives in the party all of whom were stark naked save for dirty loin cloths and he quickly saw that they were armed with the deadly blowpipes. One of them, a big fellow standing

nearly six feet, placed his finger on his lips and made a motion which the boy knew for a warning to keep still. Then the hand was removed from his mouth.

The leader at once struck off at a rapid pace and one of the others motioned for Jack to follow him. Knowing that resistance would most probably bring death he did not hesitate. The way was more open in the direction they were taking and they made good speed. So good in fact that before they had been on the way ten minutes Jack was panting hard and was finding it extremely difficult to keep up the pace. But he was afraid to lag and so kept on hoping that he would soon get his second wind. But he grew more and more tired and finally, after they had covered a couple of miles more or less, he was obliged to stop.

The black behind him raised his blowpipe to his mouth and, for an instant, the boy thought his end was come. He knew that their darts were tipped with a deadly poison and that even a slight prick from one of them meant certain death. But, as he made signs that he was all in, the man lowered the weapon and called to the leader, who was, by that time, some yards ahead. He came quickly back and, for a moment they consulted together. Then, handing his pipe to one of the others, the leader seized the boy and slung him to his back much as he would

have treated a sack of meal. Then off they started again at a scarcely slower pace. The man's strength seemed little short of miraculous and for fully a mile he carried him with little apparent effort.

Finally the man swung the boy to the ground and pointed ahead as if asking him if he thought he could walk. Jack nodded his head and the man started off again but now he did not go so rapidly and Jack had little trouble in keeping up.

Two hours passed and then, just as Jack was coming to the conclusion that he would soon have to take another rest, they came to the end of their journey. They had been pushing through a densely massed thicket of small trees for the last few minutes. Then, suddenly, the growth ended and he found himself on the edge of a clearing which was nearly circular and about two hunderd feet in diameter. In the clearing were a number of roughly made huts and a number of men and women were engaged in different occupations while naked children played about them. Evidently it was the home of a small tribe and, as he surveyed the scene, his heart sank in despair.

The arrival of the party caused no commotion until one of the women spied the white boy. Then, almost in an instant, they were all about him gazing with curious eyes and gesticulating wildly.

Jack judged that the tribe consisted of about

thirty persons not counting the children. All the men were naked except for the loin cloths but the women wore short skirts of some kind of grass, while pleated strips of the same material covered their breasts. The children wore nothing. From their actions Jack judged that most of them at least, had never before seen a white man.

One of the women ventured to reach out a hand and touch him on the arm at which motion Jack gave her his sweetest smile. But one of his captors pushed her aside with a rough shove and motioned for the boy to follow him. He was led to a small hut in the center of the clearing and pushed within. The hut, he quickly saw, was circular and only about ten feet in diameter. It was built of stakes driven into the ground and the roof consisted of long poles fastened together in the center and covered with broad leaves and grass. The hut had no window but it was not dark as plenty of light came in the spaces between the stakes, most of which were not more than three inches thick. The door, which was hardly wide enough to admit a man of more than average size, was constructed of the same material as the sides of the hut and he could not see that it was fastened.

There was absolutely nothing in the way of furniture in the hut and bare earth constituted the floor. Thoroughly fatigued with the long march he

stretched himself out on the hard ground and closed his eyes. But he did not sleep. His position was, he well knew, most serious. What they would do with him he had little idea but he could not help the shudder of fear which swept over him as he thought what his fate was likely to be. He had little doubt but that his friends had missed him by this time and were even then, searching for him. But would they be able to find him? He had noted that for the greater part of the way they had come the ground was of a nature which would leave little or no trace of the passing of the party, especially after a heavy rain. True he had broken a twig now and then whenever he had dared, but his captors had watched him so closely that opportunities had been few and he doubted if he had marked their trail plainly enough to do much good. Then another thought struck him which plunged him into still lower spirits. Even should they be able to trail him what good would it do? Seven men against so many. But somehow, the more he thought of it the more convinced he became that those seven would be able to cope successfully with almost any number of natives. He had unbounded confidence in Sol, his brother and George.

Just then the door was pushed open and a girl, not more than sixteen years old he judged, entered bringing food and water. She stared at him curi-

ously as she placed the articles on the ground at his feet and motioned for him to eat. He was hungry after his long tramp through the woods and lost no time in getting under way. There were three ripe bananas, several small rolls of some kind of dark flour and a clay bowl filled with a thick and not very inviting looking soup. He picked up the wooden spoon which was in the soup and rather gingerly tasted it. To his surprise the soup was very good indeed posssessing a rich but somewhat sweet flavor. He did not stop until he had finished the last drop and then he ate two of the bananas and all of the rolls which were light and well flavored in spite of their dark appearance. In a stone jug was water which if not cold was at least cool.

The girl watched him closely while he ate and from time to time he smiled at her as pleasantly as he was able hoping to win her good will. She smiled back each time and, as soon as he had finished, picked up the dishes and turned to leave the hut.

"Thanks," Jack called after her.

At the sound of his voice she turned and smiled and then left him alone.

"Well, they don't intend to starve me, that's sure," Jack said half aloud as soon as she was outside.

Then he again stretched out on the hard ground and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHERE IS JACK?

"'Bout time Jack was back, isn't it?"

Bob looked up from a condenser with which he had been tinkering.

"How long's he been gone?" he asked.

"Nearly two hours," George told him.

"As long as that?"

"Pretty nearly, I should say."

"Then he surely ought to be back. He said he wouldn't be gone long."

Just then Sol poked his head into the tent.

"Where's that brother of yours?" he demanded.

"Just what we were wondering," Bob told him.

"Well, if he doesn't show up pretty soon I'll think something has happened to him."

"But what could?" Bob asked, slightly alarmed.

"Nothing probably, but most anything possibly," Sol told him.

"Then hadn't we better go look for him right now?"

"He's probably all right but, I reckon, it will do no harm to take a look. It's still raining hard."

Quickly putting on their slickers they stepped out

of the tent and, as soon as Sol had motioned to Tom and told him to come with them, leaving the other blacks to care for the camp, they started off up the stream.

"Six worms wouldn't last him very long," Bob declared as they hurried along.

"And there are some mighty likely looking pools along here," George added. "Seems as though he ought to have caught six fish pretty quick if there're any in them."

Several times they had shouted each time expecting to hear the missing boy reply and, after each failure, Bob was more worried than before.

"Something's happened here."

They had reached the place where the attack had been made and it was Sol who first noted the faint signs of the presence of a number of people.

"What do you see?" Bob asked anxiously.

"See those foot prints?"

"They're marks left by bare feet," Bob declared as soon as he had examined them.

"And that means natives, of course," George added.

"Exactly."

Bob looked up quickly as Sol spoke the word.

"Then—then he's—"

"Been caught," Sol finished the sentence.

"But—"

"How many?" Sol asked Tom as the black bent over the marks.

"No can be sure. Three, mebby four."

"Think you can track 'em?"

"Mebby, mebby not. Hard in rain. Wash out marks quick."

"Let's not waste any time," Bob said, his voice shaking with fear.

"We won't," Sol assured him as Tom turned and started off, the others following close at his heels.

For perhaps half a mile the trail was easy to follow but then they came to where the character of the ground changed and they could tell that the black was hard put to it to keep on the right track. Several times in the next half mile he stopped and searched for a minute or two before starting on again. Then, finally, after he had hunted, with his eyes close to the ground for a matter of five minutes, he straightened up and, shaking his head, said: "No can find."

"But you must find it," Bob insisted.

"Do best can," he said, once more bending over and searching the ground intently.

"Here you are," Bob suddenly called from a small tree some twenty feet from where the black was looking. "See that broken twig?" he asked as the rest joined him. "He did that."

"Reckon you're right," Sol agreed and Tom nodded his head.

"I know I am."

And a few yards further on Tom again picked up the trail where the ground was a little softer.

"Here white boy's feet," he said pointing to the ground.

"That's he, all right," Bob agreed.

With hope revived they pushed on Tom leading the way and the others following close behind. But, during the next two hours, they lost the trail several times and their progress was slow. Twice during the time they had found broken twigs to show where Jack had tried to guide them, but they were so far apart that, without the aid of Tom's almost uncanny instinct, they would have been useless.

"They've probably taken him to their tribe, don't you think, Tom?" Sol asked while the black was examining the ground at the foot of a tall tree.

"Me think so," Tom replied.

"And it's more than likely that they're there by this time, eh?"

"Mebby."

Tom had again lost the trail and this time it was all of two hours before he picked it up again, more than a half mile from where he had lost it. By this time Bob and George were about tired out and they noticed that Sol was dragging his feet in a way unusual with him. During that two hour search they had covered not less than five miles and, a

good part of the time, they had been obliged to literally force their way through dense growths of some kind of vines. And they might never have found the trail again had not Bob's sharp eyes spied a broken branch. There was absolutely no other mark to show that anyone had been that way but he was certain Jack had broken the twig and, after a short search, they found tracks only a short distance away.

But soon the trail vanished again and another long search resulted.

"Gee, but I'm tired," George declared as they lost the trail again soon after five o'clock.

"I reckon we all are," Sol panted.

"But we mustn't give up," Bob insisted.

"Who said anything about giving up?" George demanded.

But, finally, the shades of night began to steal over the jungle and Tom told them that they would have to give up for the night.

"No can find in dark," he declared.

"But—" Bob began to object but Sol interupted him.

"Tom's right, son. I know it's hard but we can do nothing more until morning."

Although Bob was torn with anxiety he knew that Sol was right, so he said nothing more but threw himself on the ground and gave way to a

burst of tears. Sol and George tried to comfort him but it was some time before he could regain control of his emotions.

"We should have brought something to eat with us," Sol declared a little later.

"How far do you think we are from camp?" George asked.

"Fifteen or twenty miles, I should say."

"Then I reckon we'll have to sleep on empty stomachs."

"Where's Tom?" Bob asked.

"He's gone to see if he can find us anything to eat," Sol told them.

"What can he find in this wilderness?" George asked.

"There's lots for those who know where to look," Sol assured him. "A native will live for weeks on what he can find, and he'll bring something back, you see."

He was right for fifteen minutes later the black was back and, in a kind of basket he had made from grass and leaves, he brought three different kinds of fruit and a goodly quantity of edible roots. Soon he had a fire going and, a half hour later, he was pulling the roots from the beds of coals and offering them to the others.

"They're fine," George declared after he had sampled one.

"And I haven't seen a thing that resembled fruit all day," Bob added.

Altogether they made a fairly good supper and, as they had located a good spring near by, they did not lack for water.

"Reckon we'd better turn in," Sol proposed as soon as they had finished eating. "We must be off with the first streak of light in the morning."

Sleeping on the ground without blankets was no hardship to Bob, but it was long before sleep came to him that night. Visions of what might be happening to Jack filled his mind and for what seemed hours he sobbed silently. But, finally tired nature asserted itself and he slept.

When Jack awoke it was dark. For a moment he lay wondering where he was and then, as memory returned, he got slowly to his feet. At the first step his foot struck something and, bending over, he found that some one had brought him another meal. He was hungry and, sitting down, quickly disposed of the food which was the same in kind and amount as he had eaten earlier in the day.

"Reckon their menu is limited," he thought as he finished the last banana.

During the meal he had listened intently but had heard no sound save that caused by a fairly strong wind, and he judged that it must be late

and that the natives had all gone to bed. He had, unfortunately, left his watch in his tent that morning and so had no way of telling the time. He had also neglected to take his automatic with him and, as the thought came to him that he was absolutely unarmed, save for his pocket knife, he bitterly censured himself.

"Don't know's I'd be any better off if I had it," he thought, "but a good gun makes a fellow feel better. Wonder if they've set a watch on me."

Silently he felt his way along the side of the hut until he reached the door. It was fastened as he had expected but he could tell by the feeling that it was not a very strong door and he was certain that, with his knife, he could cut his way out given time enough. For some minutes he crouched close to the door listening. If there was a guard outside his prison he thought he ought to be able to hear his breathing. But he was unable to catch a sound which would answer the question. However, he was not entirely assured for the noise of the wind could easily smother so slight a sound.

But he pulled the knife from his pocket and was about to start to work when another thought struck him. Had he better try it? Suppose he were to get out, could he find his way out of the clearing and if he did would he not be jumping from the frying pan into the fire? For the moment, at least, he

was safe but outside and unarmed he would be at the mercy of any prowling beast. To be sure they had seen but few but he knew that, in spite of that, the jungle held many. Then, again, he would probably be hopelessly lost. Could he hope to find his way back to his friends even if he escaped the natives and the wild beasts? The former had done him no injury so far and, inasmuch as they had fed him, he hardly thought it was their intention to kill him. Why would they waste food on him if they intended to do away with him? he asked himself. But, on the other hand, he might be all wrong in his conclusion and he might not have another chance. Perhaps he had better have a try at it after all.

For another moment he hesitated and then, deciding that it would be a good plan to see if he could get out anyway, he started cutting one of the stakes just where he thought the door would be fastened. Just how it was fastened he had no way of knowing, but he thought it more than likely that it would be with a bar. He found the wood not very hard and, as his knife was sharp, he made fairly good progress though he hid not dare hurry too much for fear of breaking the blade. Every few minutes he would stop to listen. He would have given much to know the time as he had little idea as to whether it was just after dark or nearly morning. Before he had

the first stake cut half through he began to worry for fear it might get light before he finished.

He judged that it took him the best part of an hour to cut through the stake he had selected and, as soon as he had accomplished it, he started to make a second cut about a foot higher up. He could tell that, the piece between the cuts once out, he would be able to get his hand through and, he hoped, be able to free himself. The second cut did not take him quite as long as the other as the stake tapered slightly and, in another half hour or a little more, he pulled the piece out.

His heart was thumping rapidly as he forced his hand through the opening and eagerly felt for a bar or other fastening. But, although he felt first up and then down as far as he could reach, he could feel nothing in the shape of a bar and, after grouping for fully five minutes, he had to acknowledge to himself that he did not know how the door was fastened. Was it possible that he had had his work all for nothing? The thought occured to him that he might, give him time, cut a hole large enough to crawl through. But a second's thought convinced him that the plan was out of the question. It would take him hours to accomplish it even if his knife and strength held out.

He pushed as hard as he could against the door and noted that it did not yield in the least, evidence

that it was securely fastened in some way. Again he thrust his arm through the opening and tried to reach farther than he had before. He was now thoroughly alarmed for he knew that daylight would betray his attempt to escape and he shuddered as he thought of the effect it might have on his jailers. He must get out now that he had gone so far.

His arm was thrust through the hole nearly to the shoulder and he was striving to reach even farther when, without the slightest warning, his hand was seized.

For an instant Jack's heart stopped beating as he felt his hand firmly grasped, but, before he had time to collect his wits, he heard a low whisper of warning.

"Bob."

Hopefully he whispered the name but no answering word came. Instead his hand was released and instinctively he pulled it back through the hole. For a moment he could hear nothing. Then came a sound of wood grating against wood and, almost in the same instant, the door was pulled softly open. It was so dark that he was unable to see who it was that had opened the door but already he had begun to suspect. Then a soft hand found his and urged him forward while a low s-s-s-s-h warned him to make no sound.

Outside the hut it was fully as dark as it had been

inside for the night was cloudy although the rain had ceased. Followed a moment's hesitation as though his rescuer were listening, and then he was pulled gently but firmly forward and he followed as quietly as possible. They had not gone twenty feet before he heard a sound as of some large body moving almost directly ahead, and his guide fell noiselessly to the ground pulling him down with her. As he lay flat on the ground he could hear steps coming slowly toward them and soon he was aware that something had passed only a few feet to his right. They waited until the sound of the steps had died away and then his guide got slowly to her feet and he followed.

"Close call, I reckon," he thought as they started off again.

He knew they were not keeping to a straight line and judged that she was avoiding the many huts which were crowded together in the central part of the cleared space but it was so dark that, strain his eyes to the limit, he never once caught sight of a thing. Twice more sounds of moving objects caused them to stop, but at last he knew they had reached the edge of the clearing as his hand brushed against the trunk of a tree. But his guide did not pause. Instead she quickened her step pulling him after her as though safety depended on getting as far away as possible in the least possible time.

He had little idea of direction but thought they were going the way he had been brought. Then the thought of what the girl might suffer should it be discovered that she had helped him escape took hold of his mind and he wondered how he could make her understand that he could not allow her to go any farther. He knew it would be of no use to speak to her as, of course, she would be unable to understand a word he said. So, determined that he must, in some way, make her go back, he came to a sudden stop. The girl impatiently pulled him forward but he refused to move and, finally, as though understanding the reason, she dropped his hand and, stepping behind him, pushed against his body as though urging him to make all possible haste.

Jack turned and caught one of her hands in his own and, quickly bending over, kissed it, hoping that, in that way, he might make her understand his gratitude. For an instant she hesitated and he heard a sigh escape her lips. Then she was gone.

For perhaps ten minutes he waited there straining his ears to catch a sound which would indicate that her treachery had been discovered. But no sound came and, deciding that she had reached her hut in safety, he turned and struck off through the darkness. Although he had, for the time at least, escaped from the savages, he knew full well that the danger was far from being at an end. Alone at

night, in the jungle inhabited by wild beasts, with no means of protection and with only the faintest hope of being able to find his way back to his friends, his situation was little short of desperate.

After he had pushed on for a half hour or more he wondered if it would not be the wiser plan to wait for light before going farther. But he almost immediately decided against it. The savages would undoubtedly be after him as soon as his escape was discovered and his only hope of safety lay in putting as great a distance as possible between them and him before day came. So he pushed on keeping as nearly to a straight line as possible although he realized that he was probably missing it by a wide margin.

An hour or more passed and he judged that he must be at least two miles from the clearing provided he had kept the right direction. So far he had heard no sound to indicate the nearness of any wild beast and congratulated himself that he had come so far in safety. He was pretty tired as the way had been hard, and decided that it would be the part of wisdom to take a short rest. So he sat down on the ground at the foot of a tree and leaned back against the trunk.

What were Bob and the others doing? he wondered, and what were the chances that he would ever see them again? Of course they were search-

ing for him but would they be able to pick up the trail and follow it? Perhaps he had made a mistake in escaping from the savages. But, on second thought, he decided against that idea, figuring that, unless his life had been in jeopardy, the girl would have thought twice before risking her own life. Anyhow the die had been cast and there was no use in worrying over that part of it. Would he be able to find his friends? That was the main question just at present and, compared with that, all other considerations faded into insignificance.

He was about to start off again when he heard a soft but unmistakable movement only a short distance in front of him. Some large animal was there and he strained his eyes as well as his ears. At first he could see nothing, but soon he saw, or fancied he saw, two round balls of greenish colored fire seemingly about a foot above the ground. Yes, there was no mistake for now they moved slightly to the right and then back to the left. It must be either a lion or a tiger crouched to spring and his heart sank as he thought of his helplessness. But he was not one to give up so long as a ray of hope remained and, believing that he would be safer up a tree than on the ground, he moved softly around until the tree was between him and the beast, and then reached up for a limb. Fortunately his hand touched a branch slightly above his head and, making

as little noise as possible, he pulled himself up. He knew, of course, that all the members of the cat family could climb trees but he hoped that, in the darkness, he might be able to escape in case the beast followed.

The big cat's intentions were not long in doubt for he had hardly swung his body to the lower limb than he heard an ominous growl directly beneath. Hurriedly he made his way toward the top of the tree, an easy matter as the branches were almost as easy for him as stairs. He had, however, gone but a short distance before the creaking of a branch below told him that he was not the only animal in that tree. Up he went his heart beating like a trip hammer and the sweat pouring from every pore in his body. At first he thought the beast was not following him but a moment later a sound of claws digging into wood only a short distance beneath him convinced him of his mistake.

He thought he must be about two thirds of the way to the top when his hands grasped a branch which he knew must belong to another tree and the idea struck him that it would be a good plan to cross over if it could be done. So he moved rapidly but cautiously out on the limb keeping fast hold of the one above. If he could only see a foot or two ahead, he thought, it would not be so difficult.

Soon the branch on which he was standing began

to sag beneath his weight and he swung himself to the one overhead and, in another minute, had reached the trunk of the other tree. Would the beast follow him across? That was the question which filled his mind as he listened. An angry growl only a few feet away, soon answered the question and he felt the branch, on which he stood, move as the big cat reached it. Just at that instant a rift in the clouds allowed the moon to peep out shedding a faint light over the jungle and, straining his eyes, he could see a shadowy form coming toward him along the limb.

To wait there would be fatal and to go higher would, he felt, be equally useless, so he made his way, as rapidly as possible, to the ground and started on a run in the direction he had been going before stopping to rest. It was not a fast run as the going between the trees would not permit it but he managed to make it considerably faster than a walk. Several times he tripped and fell but fortunately did not hurt himself. Nor did he pause to learn whether or not the beast was following him. But, finally, the pace began to tell on his wind and he was forced to slow down a bit and now, to his dismay, a loud crashing in the undergrowth, not far behind, told him that he had not succeeded in throwing the cat off his trail.

What should he do? It was, he knew, a matter

of only a few minutes at the most before he would be overtaken and then—. Just then his toe caught on a root and he plunged headlong his body striking something soft.

"What the dickins."

"Bob, quick, your gun!"

How Bob happened to be in that particular place just at that time he did not stop to consider. It was enough that he recognized his voice and knew there was need of quick action.

"What's up?"

That was Sol's voice and he quickly answered.

"Something's after me."

"Where?"

"Close by—"

But before he could finish the sentence a shot rang out followed by a snarl of pain.

"Got him," Bob cried exultantly.

"Better give him another shot," Sol advised, and once more the rifle spoke.

"What—what is it?" Jack gasped.

"A tiger and a big fellow," Bob told him.

"First a gorilla and then a tiger," Jack panted. "I wonder what'll get after me next."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BARGAIN

"Now tell us about it."

Jack had gotten back his wind and they had all taken a good look at the huge beast which had come so near to bringing his career to an end and they were eager to hear his story.

"We'd better let the story rest and make tracks, if you ask me," Jack said.

"You mean they're after you?"

"Perhaps not yet, but I reckon they will be as soon as they find I've skipped.

"The boy's right," Sol declared as he turned to the black. "Set the pace, Tom, and we'll follow. Sure you can find the way back all right?"

"Me find him. Better hurry."

"You said something," Jack assured him.

The clouds had broken and the full moon now made the jungle light enough to permit them to travel nearly as easily as if it had been day. Jack was tired but he did his best to conceal it and insisted that they set a fast pace.

"I don't want those fellows to get hold of me again," he declared.

"Better save your wind," Bob cautioned, and he took the advice.

In a little more than an hour dawn began to steal over the forest and soon if was broad daylight. They had been making good time considering the difficulties of the going and not once had Jack asked to stop. But now he knew that he was about to the end of his endurance and that before long he would have to have a rest.

"You look about all in," Bob said as they paused by the side of a large spring for a drink.

"Guess I am," Jack admitted.

"Then we'll rest a bit," Sol proposed.

"Afraid I'll have to," Jack again admitted.

But a long slow drink of the cold water did much to restore his strength and, at the end of ten minutes, he declared that he was all right.

"You sure?" Sol asked anxiously.

"Feel like a two year old," Jack smiled as he got to his feet.

"Well, it's more than likely they're on our trail by this time and, if you're all right, we'd better be off. Still you don't want—"

"I'm good for a few more miles," Jack grinned.

"How much farther?" Sol asked Tom.

"Mebby five mile," the black told them.

"I can make it all right," Jack insisted.

"Take it a bit easy," Sol cautioned the black as he was about to start.

"Better make it fast," Jack interposed.

"But—"

"I tell you I can stand a fast pace for five miles," Jack interrupted.

"All right. Have it your own way, but don't tax your strength too far," Sol said.

"I promise," Jack smiled.

Two hours later they stumbled into camp.

"That last leg may have been only five miles but I'm betting it was nearer ten," Bob declared as he threw himself on the ground in front of his tent. "How you feeling, old man?"

"A bit stiff in the joints but I'm worth a dozen dead men right now," Jack grinned as he threw himself by Bob's side.

"What are we going to do now?" George asked turning to Sol.

"Get something to eat the first thing," Sol said, and, turning to Mat, who with the other two blacks, was standing a few feet away, he gave orders for breakfast. "And make it snappy," he added. Then, turning back to the boys explained: "I don't know whether those fellows are after us or not but, if they are, they could catch us easily enough anyhow, and we might as well have it out with them here if it's got to be."

"Do you think they will come?" George asked.

"Perhaps I can make a better guess after

Jack tells us his story," Sol said.

As he spoke Jack sat up and began his account of his adventure and no one interrupted him. When he had finished Sol, after a moment's thought, said: "I guessed that was about the way of it. You say there were about thirty in the tribe?"

"About that, as near as I could guess."

"And they fed you well?"

"Good what there was of it and plenty of it such as it was," Jack smiled.

"Well, I might's well tell you right off that I'm up a tree," Sol told them. Then, after a short pause, he added: "Let's see what Tom thinks about it."

He called the black and repeated Jack's story and, when he had finished, asked him what he thought.

Tom scratched his head thoughtfully for a moment and then expressed the opinion that they had probably intended to take him to some other larger tribe and sell him as a slave. "Them fellers do that," he added.

"Then you don't think they intended to kill him?"

"No think so, but, mebby, that be better," Tom shook his head slowly as he turned back to the fire.

"Just a minute, Tom," Sol called him back. "Do you think we'll have trouble with them?"

"No can tell. Better be ready," the black advised.

"He evidently thinks it would be a bad thing to be a slave to one of these tribes," Bob said as soon as the black had left them.

"And I've no doubt but that he's right," Sol assured them.

"Then you owe that girl a lot," Bob said turning to Jack.

"I'll say I do. I don't believe I'd ever have escaped if she hadn't helped me."

Just then Tom announced breakfast and they lost no time in obeying the summons. They had hardly finished the meal when, without the slightest warning, a stranger stood in their midst. He was a tall well built black entirely without clothing save the regular loin cloth. In his left hand he carried a long oval shaped shield and in his right the dreaded blowpipe. For a full minute he stood looking at them without speaking. Then his lips parted.

"Woomba gumbo wak wingo."

That was the way the words sounded to Bob, who afterwards carefully wrote them down. Sol, who seemed to be the one addressed, smiled and shook his head, whereupon the black repeated the statement more slowly.

"Him mean one white boy belong him," Tom explained.

"Ask him why," Sol ordered.

Tom had a good deal of difficulty in making the man understand the question but, at last, succeeded and, after some more jabbering and much gesticulating, he announced the result.

"Him say him find him when him lost so him belong him."

"That's a lie," Jack said getting to his feet. "I wasn't lost."

"Easy, son," Sol advised. Then he told Tom to tell the black that the boy had not been lost and that he could not have him.

This took a long time but, finally, the man understood and his face took on a wicked frown.

"What's he say?" Sol asked impatiently after the visitor had worked himself into a rage.

"Say him going to have him."

"Ask him how," Sol ordered.

"Him say his tribe all about us and kill us all we no give him up," Tom announced after a long wrangle.

"Ask him what he wants of him," was the next order.

"Him sell him him say," after a short discussion.

It was evident that they were rapidly getting used to each other's vernacular.

"Ask him how much he's worth."

This took some little time as Tom evidently was having much difficulty in translating the black's reply into English money. But finally he held up one finger.

"Him mean him get mebby one pound, mebby little more."

"Gee, is that all I'm worth," Jack whispered.

Sol disappeared into his tent after telling Tom to ask the black to wait a minute, and soon came out carrying in his hands four watches, of the Ingersol type, and half a dozen cheap pocket knives. These he handed to Tom telling him to offer them to the man if he would agree to give up his claim to Jack and leave them alone.

Tom took the trinkets and held them so that the black could see them at the same time jabbering rapidly. The man's eyes took on a look of intense excitement and it was evident that he was much pleased with the trade he was about to make. But it was also evident that he was going to get all he could for he kept shaking his head and holding up first five fingers, then four and finally two.

"Him say two more tick tick him go way," Tom announced.

"Tell him that's all he'll get," Sol snapped.

"Him say one more," Tom said after another period of wrangling.

"No more," Sol shook his head and made a mo-

tion as though to take the things away from Tom.

That motion was too much for the savage and, at once, his attitude changed and, showing his white teeth in a broad grin, he held out his hand. Tom said a few words and then handed him the watches and knives and, in another minute, he had disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

"And that's that," Sol declared.

"And to think that he'd have given me up for two dollars worth of watches," Jack groaned.

"Well, you see, we'd have two boys left and watches are mighty scarce here," Sol told him soberly. "As it is you've about broke up the trading department. But it's lucky that I happened to bring a few of those things along," he added.

"But would they have attacked us?" George asked him.

"That's pretty hard to say. Frankly I doubt it. You see, those fellows know enough about white people to know that we put considerable value on our lives and the lives of our friends, and they think twice now days before doing anything to bring the anger of the white men upon them."

"It's a wonder then that you were so prodigal in paying my ransom," Jack grinned.

"I reckon it was some wasteful," Sol returned, "but it's done now and we'll have to make the best of it."

"Do you think he had a gang with him or was he just bluffing?" Bob asked. "I didn't hear anything of them."

"You wouldn't have. They know how to keep still if they don't know anything else. But he may have been bluffing at that. Anyhow I didn't think it best to call his bluff because it's more than likely that he had a few men, at least, with him."

"Well, when do we start?" Jack asked.

"Not to-day."

"Huh?"

"I said not to-day. We're going to rest to-day."

"But—"

"No buts about it," Sol interrupted. "We'd all be fagged out before we'd gone a mile if we started off now. Anyhow I would."

"Then you aren't staying just on my account?"

"Not a bit of it, although I reckon a rest will do you no harm. Now you get to bed and don't let me see you till dinner time."

Only half satisfied Jack did as he was ordered and was asleep almost immediately.

"Gee, but those trout would have tasted good," he declared as they were eating a late dinner that afternoon.

"Bob wanted to try his luck," Sol told him, "but I didn't think it safe. Those fellows may be hanging around here yet."

They were off bright and early the next morning and, for several hours, the way being through fairly open ground, they made good time and, when they halted for dinner, Sol declared that they had covered not a foot less than fifteen miles. But they struck heavier going soon after dinner and the end of the afternoon saw them but a few miles nearer the end of their journey. That night they had a successful "picture show" but, as usual gave the folks at home no hint of danger through which they had passed.

Late the following afternoon they reached a river of considerable size and Tom told them they they could take to the canoes as it went their way for some distance.

As it was nearly time to camp for the night they quickly decided to call it a day and get the canoes ready for an early start in the morning. During the past two days they had seen considerable big game including two lions but they had shot nothing much to the disgust of the blacks. Declaring that he was famished for a taste of fresh fish Jack announced his intention of trying his luck in the river.

"Look out you don't hook on to a gator," George laughed.

"And don't you go out of sight," Sol added.

Fortunately Jack had another rod, which he had brought with him, and plenty of lines and hooks. To be sure the rod was not his favorite but, having

lost that one through no fault of his, he was not one to complain. It took him nearly a half hour to dig enough worms but he finally secured a dozen fair sized ones and, in the course of another hour, he returned and proudly exhibited seven fish none of them weighing less than two pounds and the largest tipped the scales at five pounds. In appearance they were much like a small mouth bass.

"Them make good eat," Mat declared as the boy handed them over to him.

"They better had," Jack told him.

The meal that night was all they had anticipated and Jack promised to keep them in fish as long as they followed the river.

They were off early the next morning and all were in high spirits finding the paddling an agreeable change, although the current of the river was very slow what there was was with them and, for a time, they made the light canoes fairly fly through the water. Crocodiles were plentiful but seemed very sluggish to the boys as, every now and then, they were obliged to make a quick change in their course to avoid hitting one of the huge reptiles.

"It's a good thing they aren't lively," Jack said to Mat, who was his canoe mate.

"Them slow now in hot weather," The black admitted.

"Then they get more lively, eh?"

"Them get some much more kick when it cool get."

"Well, I rather think I like them better as they are now," Jack grinned. "Their teeth are beautiful," he added.

Shortly after dinner the river began to widen and by three o'clock had become almost a lake being fully a mile in width, but it soon narrowed again and, when they decided to stop for the night, was so narrow that they could touch either side with a paddle.

"Looks like we'd have to hoof it again to-morrow," George said as he stepped to the bank.

"No can tell," Tom informed him. "Mebby get wide mebby not."

"Well, let's hope mebby yes," Jack laughed as he jumped from his canoe.

For some miles the forest, on either side of the river, had been unusually dense and they had been looking for fully an hour to find an open space large enough to pitch their tents in, and their present location did not permit it until the blacks had done considerable work with their matchetes.

"Some spooky place if you ask me," Bob declared after he had succeeded in finally getting his tent up.

"And you don't mean maybe," Jack added.

"You said it."

It was dark by the time supper was over and everything made snug for the night, and they decided that they were too tired to wait until nine o'clock for "the pictures."

"We'll have them to-morrow night if nothing happens," Sol told them as he pulled off his boots.

Jack was asleep almost as soon as he struck his blanket but, for some reason which he was unable to define, Bob was wide awake. In vain he counted thousands of sheep jumping over a fence and told himself that he was going right to sleep. Sleep simply wouldn't come to him and, finally, he gave up trying when his watch told him it was eleven o'clock. Complete silence held the jungle except that now and then the shrill chirp of a cricket, somewhere outside the tent, reached his ears. Half past eleven and twelve o'clock came and still he did not sleep. Then, aware that his nerves were getting on edge, he determined to go outside and move about a bit.

Slowly and careful to make no sound, which would distrub Jack, he wriggled out of the tent and finally stood up. It was so dark that he was unable to see his hand before his face and so still that he fancied he could hear the beating of his heart. Why had he been unable to sleep? Was it because some danger threatened them? Was there such a thing as intuition? These and other ques-

tions wandered through his mind as he stood there close in front of the tent. He knew it would be unsafe and contrary to the wishes of Sol to venture outside the encampment so he moved a foot or so until his outstretched hand encountered the trunk of a tree and sat down with his back against it. For what seemed a long time he sat there listening to catch the faintest sound of the approach of man or beast, for he was pretty well convinced, in his own mind, that danger of some sort was not far distant.

Then, suddenly, he heard a sound slightly to his right and, without making the least sound, he got quickly to his feet, and stood, leaning against the tree, with every nerve tensed. He felt rather than heard some object approaching him and then something struck him on the chest. Instantly he threw out his arms and the next instant he was rolling over on the ground striving to obtain a strangle hold on his enemy. The ground, where they had fallen, was soft and, for a time, they made hardly a sound as they struggled for the mastery. Bob found his opponent strong and, evidently no novice in the art of wrestling. Once the man secured a firm grip on his throat and, for a moment, he thought it was all up with him. But, resorting to a trick, he had once learned from a Jap, he succeeded in getting free. But the other knew some tricks as well and,

try as he might, he could not get a decisive hold. The fellow's muscles seemed to be of steel and his activity was, it seemed to Bob, wonderful. Time and again he thought he had secured a hold which would end the struggle only to have the other squirm out.

Suddenly a blinding light shown full upon them and, almost at once, Jack's voice rang out.

"Hey, there, what's the big idea?"

At the moment Bob was underneath and, as the light wavered a bit, he saw George's face just above his own.

"Well, I'll be jiggered."

George jumped to his feet as he said the words and Bob quickly followed him.

"What's all the rumpus?"

Sol asked the question as he joined the three boys.

"These two idiots—" Jack began, but Bob interrupted him.

"I—I thought it was a savage."

"Sa-same here," George panted.

"Well, you both look the part, all right," Sol told them.

"Anyhow he fought like one," Bob grinned.

"Well, tell us about it, can't you?" Jack demanded.

"Well," Bob began, "I couldn't sleep so I came

out here and was standing against the tree when he jumped me."

"That's about the way my story would run," George said as Bob paused.

"But it seems to me you ought to have known it was no savage by your clothes," Jack suggested.

"That's so," Bob acknowledged. "But, to tell the truth, I never thought of it. I was too busy keeping his hands away from my throat."

"That goes here too," George laughed.

"Well, I'm glad there are no casualties," Sol remarked as he turned back to his tent.

"But when I have another fight, if I ever do, I sure hope it wont be with you," Bob said laying his hand on George's shoulder. "I thought I was fairly good at that sort of thing but—"

"You are, I'll tell the world," George interrupted. "I'd rather scrap with a wild cat any day."

"And another thing," Bob said, turning to Jack, "don't ever again talk to me about intuition."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"It's all bunk, that's all."

"Will you kindly elucidate."

"Well, it's like this, I thought I had an intuition that something was wrong and look what it got me into."

"Me too," George grinned.

"So I say it's all bunk," Bob repeated.

"Don't you believe it," Jack told them. "You had an intuition that something was going to happen, didn't you?"

"Well, I thought I had."

"And something happened, didn't it?"

"Sure did."

"Well?"

"You win," George laughed.

"But it's all bunk, just the same," Bob insisted.

"Well, there's no use in arguing with you when once you've made up your mind, but I have an intuition right now that I'm going back to bed and you'd better do the same thing."

"I believe in that kind of intuition," Bob laughed as he followed Jack into the tent. "And I have an intuition that I can go to sleep now," he added as he stretched out on his blanket.

CHAPTER NINE

ROUGH GOING

THEIR hopes that the river would broaden out died soon after they started the next morning for, before they had gone a mile, it petered out almost entirely and they were forced to pack up and continue on foot.

"It's hard luck but we'll have to grin and bear it," Sol told them as they started off after an hour spent in making up the packs.

"Maybe we'll strike another river soon," Bob added hopefully.

"I wouldn't count on it for a number of days," Sol said shaking his head.

They at once plunged into a jungle more dense than anything they had so far encountered and their progress all that day was painfully slow.

"This is the worst ever," George declared as he stopped to wipe the sweat from his face.

"It's not exactly what you'd call a boulevard," Bob panted close behind him.

"But it might be worse," Jack added as he caught up with them.

"Don't see how," Bob grumbled.

"Well, I don't know's I do either, unless we strike a place where we can't go at all," Jack agreed.

It was while they were eating dinner that Jack asked Sol if he believed in intuition. Sol did not reply for a moment but sat as though lost in thought.

"That's a pretty hard question," he finally said. "Sometimes I think I do and then again I think it's all bunk."

"Just what I think," Bob grinned and told him of their discussion the night before.

"What's the difference between intuition and a hunch?" George asked.

"Why, I reckon intuition is just a hunch with a college education," Jack told him.

"Well, I've a hunch that I'm going to get tired pretty early to-day," George laughed.

"That's the kind of hunch I believe in, something you know is going to happen," Bob laughed.

"Kind of a postgraduate hunch, I'd call it," Jack added.

All that afternoon they pushed through a forest that was all but impenetrable. Small trees, growing so closely together that their branches intermingled, and a thick growth of creeping vines made anything faster than a snail like progress impossible. To add to their misery a small but extremely vicious black fly had put in an appearance soon after they had started that morning. The fly resembled a

winged ant more than anything else and its bite was almost as severe as the sting of a wasp. Fortunately they were well provided with a paste which, smeared on their face and hands, protected them to a certain extent, but not completely. Curiously enough the flies did not bother the blacks at all.

"First time I ever wished I was a negro," Jack confided to his brother late in the afternoon.

"They do seem to have a bit of an advantage of us," Bob agreed.

"Only we're the ones that are getting bit," Jack grinned.

"If it wasn't for this paste I believe they'd eat us alive."

"You said it. Bless the man that invented it."

Sol called a halt soon after five o'clock declaring that he was willing to call it a day.

"Willing! That doesn't begin to express my state of mind," George panted as he threw his pack to the ground and sank down beside it.

"I wouldn't go another mile to-day if you'd give me the continent," Jack declared as he did likewise.

"Another mile!" Bob scoffed. "Better wait till we've gone one first."

It took the blacks nearly an hour to clear a place large enough to pitch the tents in and, by the time supper was ready, they were somewhat rested, although Sol declared that he knew now that he was not so young as he used to be.

"Reckon I'll have to give up this sort of thing in another fifty years or so," he groaned as he slowly got to his feet.

"Do you think we'll have much more of this sort of thing?" Bob asked.

"Can't tell, but I sure hope not," Sol told him.

"I say, Bob," George called from his tent as they were getting ready for bed. "I wish you'd let me know if you're going to do any prowling about to-night and I'll stay in."

"I reckon I'll be pretty busy in my tent to-night judging by the way I feel now," Bob laughed. "Don't think I'll have to be rocked to sleep."

"Well, I sure hope we don't both get restless at the same time again," George declared.

"Same here. If it's going to develop into a habit we'd better take turns at it."

"Run on a schedule like," Jack chimed in.

Bob was asleep that night almost as soon as he closed his eyes and breakfast was ready the next morning before he opened them.

"Reckon we pretty near slept the clock around that time," Jack laughed as they crawled out of the tent.

The day was a repetition of the one before. If anything it seemed worse, although Jack declared that such a thing was impossible. Each, however, did his best to keep up the spirits of the others and

no one permitted himself to find fault. All day, with only a short stop for dinner, they pushed on, the blacks leading the way and, with their heavy machetes, clearing a path.

"I don't believe those fellows know what it means to get tired," George declared as, late in the afternoon, they paused for a short rest.

"They sure work like a machine," Bob agreed.

"And a well oiled one at that," Jack added.

"How far do you think we've made to-day?" Bob asked turning to Sol.

"Not over five miles," Sol ventured.

"And we probably won't make more than one more," Jack added.

"Hardly that, I reckon," Sol told him. "It'll be time to quit in about another hour."

"Can't make me mad," Jack declared.

That last hour was the hardest of all and even the blacks showed signs of fatigue when, shortly after five o'clock, Sol decided to call it a day. With the exception of a few small monkeys they had seen no beasts since leaving the river and Jack declared it was not to be wondered at seeing that he couldn't imagine any self-respecting animal living in such a country.

"If we don't get out where it's easier going soon," he told Bob, "I reckon snow'll fly before we get to where we're going."

But they got out sooner than they had dared hope. Before they had been on the march an hour the following morning the dense jungle ended so suddenly that they looked at each other in amazement as they beheld a vast open stretch of country before them. For miles ahead the land was nearly level and utterly devoid of trees, the only growth, so far as they could see, being a sort of coarse grass about a foot or fourteen inches high.

"There's something moving out there," Jack declared, pointing out over the plain.

"Looks like men to me," George ventured.

"And they're coming this way," Bob added.

"Can you make it out?" Sol asked one of the blacks.

"Men," the black told him after a moments gaze.

"About six of them?" Sol asked.

"Five."

"Think we'd better hide?"

"From five?"

There was, as Jack afterward confided to Bob, a tremendous amount of disgust in the black's tone as he spoke.

"Oh, well, if that's the way you feel about it I reckon we'll go on," Sol nodded.

As the two parties approached each other it was evident that curiosity was not confined to the white men for the five savages were seen to stop several

times and it was plain that they were undecided whether to come on or to go back. But each time they advanced a little nearer until, at Sol's suggestion, Mat waved his hands and shouted a greeting to them. At first they seemed not to understand for they came to a halt and, for a moment conversed earnestly together. Then, as though resolved to make the best of a bad matter, they advanced holding out empty hands as a sign of peace.

Mat, who was an excellent linguist in native dialects, tried several before they understood him and then their black faces lighted up with eagerness. Mat asked them a number of questions which they answered readily enough and then he turned to Sol to interpret.

"Them say them been up north many miles to big gathering of tribes and now them get back home. That why we see not many men," he explained. "Them say big lot ugly men come through woods over there," pointing in the direction they were going.

"They think they will be hostile to us if we meet them?" Sol asked.

"Them say so."

"Did they say what we'd better do?"

"No say. Them no care. Them kill us if they dare."

"I reckon," Sol mused.

While they had been talking the savages had been slowly edging their way toward the jungle and now, almost as though the earth had swallowed them, they disappeared.

"Now you see 'em and now you don't," Jack laughed.

"I've seen enough of them," Bob said soberly.

"I'd sure hate to meet any of them when they had the upper hands," George added.

"What do you think?" Sol asked turning to the blacks who had been talking together in their native tongue.

"Mebby them lie, mebby not," Mat told him.

"Then you think we'd better go on?"

"No. We think we better, what you call him, play safe."

"How?"

"We go back in jungle an' hide an' see what come."

"What do you say boys?"

"I reckon he knows his stuff," Jack said, and Bob and George nodded agreement.

"That's what I think we'd better do, play safe," Sol told them as he turned back toward the jungle.

After a brief search they found a place where they believed they would be well hidden and, at the same time, had a good view of the open plain for several miles.

"You get up in that tree and keep a close watch," Sol ordered one of the men.

Two hours passed slowly before the lookout reported anything in sight. Then he called down that he could see a number of men coming.

"How many?" Sol asked.

"Some many. Them keep coming, the lookout told him.

"I'm going up to take a look," Jack declared as he leaped for a branch. "I'd say there was about a million of them," he announced a moment later as he rejoined them on the ground.

"You really mean it?" Bob asked.

"Well, there's a lot of them," Jack told him. "Several hundred at least."

"I reckon it's a good thing we didn't go on," Sol told them.

"But do you suppose they'll go by without finding us?" George asked anxiously.

"Unless those other fellows find some way to get word to them I think we're safe enough."

"You think that's likely?" Bob asked.

"I'm afraid so."

"But they could hardly do it before they get into the jungle."

"I reckon that would be time enough, but some of these tribes have a mighty efficient method of signaling," Sol said grimly.

"Hadn't we better be on the move then?" Jack suggested.

"What do you say, Mat?" Sol asked.

"If them know them find us easy," Mat replied.

"I suppose that's true," Sol mused.

"Then we might as well stay right here?" George asked.

"I reckon," Sol told him. "Of course it's not at all certain that they will do us any harm if they do find us. Most of these tribes are friendly enough.

By this time the foremost of the advancing natives were in sight and soon it was evident that there was a large number of them.

"It'll be nearly an hour before they get here, I reckon," Sol told them. "They've probably got their women and children with them and you can see for yourselves that they're not making much time."

"Do you suppose there's more than one tribe of them?" Bob asked.

"Must be," Sol told him. "That's too large a crowd for one tribe."

As they came nearer the truth of Sol's opinion was evident. Each tribe was by itself although there was but little space between them.

"Eight tribes, I make it," Sol ventured when they were only about a quarter of a mile away.

"Same here," George agreed.

"And about fifty to a tribe," Jack added.

"More or less," Sol agreed.

It was evident soon that the advancing host would enter the jungle about a hundred yards from where they were hiding and Sol gave the order to keep perfectly quiet.

"Those fellows have mighty keen ears," he cautioned them.

By now they could see that there were a large number of women and children of all ages, the smaller ones being strapped to their mother's backs, while those of more advanced age darted here and there among their elders as though making a game of the journey. The men were naked save for loin cloths while the women wore short skirts of some kind of grass. Some of the men carried long spears while others were armed with the deadly blowpipes. Nearly all of them carried long oval shields on their left arms. For the most part they were large, many of them being well over six feet, and splendidly proportioned.

It was nearly an hour from the time the foremost entered the forest until the last had disappeared in its depths.

"We'll wait another half hour and then we'll start if we don't hear anything," Sol whispered.

"Maybe there'll be some more tribes," Bob ventured.

"Maybe, but, I reckon, we'll have to take a chance on that," Sol told him.

"Your half hour is up," Bob announced a little later as he glanced at his watch.

"Then I reckon we'll be on the way," Sol said as he got to his feet and beckoned to one of the blacks.

They were soon out in the open and had gone perhaps a mile when Jack, who happened to be bringing up the rear, glanced back and uttered a startled cry.

"They're coming after us all right."

"Looks like it for a fact," Bob agreed after he had taken a look in the direction in which Jack was pointing.

They had all stopped by this time and the blacks were conversing together being a few yards ahead of the white men.

"I don't just like the way they're acting," Sol muttered.

"Think they're planning to skip and leave us?" George asked.

"Looks as though they were considering it," Sol confessed.

"Well, I guess they've made up their minds one way or the other," Bob said as Mat came toward them.

"Them come," he said shortly.

"Yes, they're coming all right," Sol agreed. "What do you think we'd better do?"

The black shrugged his shoulders.

"No can do but wait," he said.

"You think they mean to capture us?"

"Me t'ink so."

"And it's no use for us to run for it?"

"Them catch us easy."

"I suppose they would," Sol mused. "Well, perhaps they only want to see if they can trade with us or something of that sort."

"Them no have anything to trade this time."

"I suppose that's so. Then you think they're hostile?"

"Me 'fraid it."

By this time the boys could see that there were about twenty men in the band that was coming back and they knew, without being told, that it would be useless to resist them. So they waited calmly while they came on.

"You talk with them and find out what they want," Sol ordered Mat.

"Me talk," the negro agreed and advanced to meet the band now only a hundred yards away.

The natives stopped as soon as they saw that one of their color was coming to meet them and, for several minutes they talked. Then Mat turned and came back slowly while the others stood and watched him.

"Well?" Sol asked.

"Them say we have go with them."

"Go where?"

"Go them home, twenty mile from here."

"What do they want with us?"

"Them no say."

"You asked, of course."

"Me asked. Them no say."

"You think they mean to harm us?"

"No can tell. Them no say. Them say we go with them."

"Suppose we refuse," Bob suggested.

"That do no good. Them kill us."

"I reckon that's right too," Jack declared.

"Yes, we'll have to do as they say," Sol decided. "But keep a stiff upper lip. I've seen sicker cats than this get well."

"Me tell them we come?" Mat asked.

"Yes, tell them we'll come."

Mat returned and, after a few words with the largest of the natives, a man who evidently was a chief or ruler of some sort, motioned for them to come. As soon as they were within a few yards of the band half of them, at a signal from the chief, closed in behind them while the rest turned back the way they had come. Almost as soon as they had entered the jungle they turned to a more northernly direction than that from which they had come.

They had advanced not more than a mile when Sol turned to Mat, who was only a short distance behind him.

"Tell that fellow that we can't keep up this pace," he ordered.

"That's the stuff," Jack panted.

"I'll drop in another ten feet if he doesn't slow down," Bob added.

Mat hurried forward and spoke to the leader while the boys watched to see how he would take the request. Their hearts sank as they saw him shake his head angrily.

"Guess his nibbs doesn't take kindly to the idea," Jack whispered.

"But we can't keep up this pace through this kind of going," George declared.

"And for one I'm not going to try," Bob added. "There's no use trying to do the impossible."

The whole band had halted and they could see that nearly all of them were casting savage glances at their captives.

"We don't seem to be very popular with them," Jack declared.

"Well, here's hoping we will improve on further acquaintance," Bob said as he shifted his pack.

"Him say him want make home before dark," Mat told them as he came back.

"Twenty miles through this going," Jack groaned.

"I guess he'll have to want if he's going to take us with him," George added ruefully.

"Better try," Mat advised with a shake of his woolly head.

"I reckon we'll have to," Sol said. "Maybe they'll go a bit slower when they find that we really can't make it."

Before anyone had time to say anything more the leader started off and they were obliged to follow.

"I wish that fellow could talk United States," Jack grumbled as he started off.

"Seems to me we ought to be catching up with the rest of the crowd before long," Bob said after they had gone a short distance. "It's a cinch that the women and kids can't go through this as fast as we've been going."

"Don't know about that," Jack replied. "Those women looked pretty husky to me, and as for the kids, I reckon they'd wriggle through most anything."

"I don't believe we're going the same way the rest went," George broke in. "It doesn't look to me as though anyone had ever been this way let alone three or four hundred."

"Maybe these fellows are taking a short cut," Bob suggested.

"But I didn't notice when we branched off," Jack added.

"You boys had better save your breath," Sol told them. "You'll need it all."

The boys knew that he was right for, although the natives had set a slower pace, it was still so fast that they were having all they could do to keep up. The jungle was fully as dense as anywhere they had been but the ten men, who went in front of them, left a trail which made it much easier than it otherwise would have been. Still they were soon panting for breath and, inside of an hour, they were obliged to beg for another rest. This was granted with rather poor grace by the chief after he had come back and seen that they were about all in.

"What did he say?" Sol asked Mat after he had left them.

"Him say we mighty soft, no good."

"I'd like to meet him with a pair of four ounce gloves," Bob snapped.

"If he should hit you once there'd only be a small grease spot left. Did you notice his hands and arms?" Jack chuckled.

"But I'll bet he couldn't hit me unless he knows more about the game than I think he does," Bob retorted.

Just then the chief gave the signal to start off again and they had to save their breath. The rest had been so short, hardly five minutes, that inside another half hour they were again spent and Sol

sent Mat forward to tell the chief that they would have to have a longer rest. The black returned with a worried look on his face.

"Him say him give one more rest an' then we keep up or him kill us," he announced.

"Think he means it?" Sol asked.

"Me 'fraid so."

"It looks kind of serious to me," Jack panted as he threw himself on the ground.

"It's all of that," Bob agreed.

"A fellow can do just so much and then he's done," George added.

For a few moments no one spoke. Then, suddenly, Jack sat up.

"I say, Bob," he began in a low voice, "why not try some of your ventriloquist stuff on them?"

"You think it would do any good?" Bob asked turning to Sol.

"It might."

"But I'd have to talk United States and I don't suppose he knows a word of it," Bob objected.

"Gee, I didn't think of that," Jack groaned.

"I'd try it anyhow. It may interest him enough so that he'll have Mat translate it," George suggested.

"Here he comes now. Do your stuff and do it right," Jack whispered.

The big chief came up close to them and, for a

moment looked at them closely as though trying to learn their condition. As he saw that they were still panting heavily a deep frown gathered on his face. He was looking straight at Bob when a deep solemn voice, seemingly coming from the dense forest to their right, caused him to turn in that direction.

"Mighty chief beware. Mighty chief beware. Mighty chief beware."

Three times the words were repeated and they could see a look first of wonder and then of fear steal over the face of the native. He hesitated a moment and then like a flash darted into the woods in the direction from which the voice had seemed to come. He was gone a few minutes and, when he returned, they could see that he was deeply troubled.

Jack nudged his brother and again the deep voice thundered the solemn words, and this time they were so loud that they seemed to fill the jungle. Jack could hardly repress a chuckle as he saw that the chief's knees were shaking and he knew that he was badly scared.

"Give it to him, you've got him going," he whispered.

Not a particle did Bob's lips move but still again the voice thundered its warning.

"Mighty chief beware. Mighty chief beware. Mighty chief beware."

Jack looked back to where the rest of the natives were huddled together and saw that they were fairly shaking with terror. On Mat's face was a look of bewilderment and he was saying something to the other blacks. He was standing only a few paces from the chief and as Bob again repeated the words the chief, in a husky voice, called Mat to him and gave some order which, of course, the boys could only guess at. Mat, evidently at the chief's order, made some reply and then, in a loud voice which he tried to keep steady, he shouted:

"Who say 'Mighty chief beware'"?

"The Great Spirit talks to his son," came back in a stern deep tone.

Mat translated the reply to the chief and then asked:

"What Great Spirit want?"

"The Great Spirit is much displeased with his son."

"For why?"

"Why does my son capture the white men and their servants?"

Bob threw into the question all the force he could muster.

"Does the Great Spirit care for them?" Mat asked after translating the question to the chief.

"They are my sons."

"What Great Spirit want?" was the next question.

"Let white men and their servants go free and never harm them."

There was a look of great relief on the chief's face as Mat translated the order and, as Jack afterward declared, he tumbled all over himself in his eagerness to get rid of them. In fact in less than a minute there was not one of the band in sight.

"Gee, but it—" Jack began when Bob gave him a strong nudge.

"Don't give it away to our men," he whispered.

"Kick me for a simpleton," Jack whispered back.

"We'd better be going," Sol broke in. "Those fellows may get over their fear and come back for us although I don't think it."

They started on the back trail at once and made as good time as possible pausing to rest only when it was absolutely necessary. The trail had been cleared by the passage of so many that they found it fairly easy going and in less than two hours they were back at the edge of the jungle.

CHAPTER TEN

"SOME BABIES"

"I MOVE we camp here for the night," Jack said as he threw himself on the ground. "I'm about all in."

"Second the motion," Bob and George exclaimed in the same breath as they followed suit.

"I'm for it," Sol agreed and gave the blacks orders to get the camp under way.

"You sure did the job, Bob," Jack chuckled as soon as they were alone.

"I reckon it saved our lives," Sol added.

"You really think they would have killed us?" George asked.

"Maybe not, but I'm satisfied with things as they are," Sol told him.

"You said it," Jack laughed.

"These natives are mighty uncertain," Sol explained. "There's no telling what they will do. As a rule they are fairly friendly and there's not much danger from them but sometimes they go on a rampage and then you want to look out."

"Guess they must be on one of their rampages now," Jack declared.

"It's a good thing for us that they're so superstitious and so easily fooled," George said.

"Easily fooled, did you say?" Jack asked him. "I reckon there are mighty few that could have done it," he added.

"I didn't mean it was an easy thing to do," George quickly explained. "I guess I know that Bob's one in a thousand."

"One in a hundred thousand would be nearer it," Jack retorted.

"I'll make it a million," George laughed.

They had chosen a spot a few rods from the trail and back far enough in the forest so that there was little danger of being discovered by any other tribe should one cross the open.

"It's just occurred to me that I'm hungry," Jack said a little later.

"Well, I guess the rest of us could eat something and there's Mat telling us to come and get it." Sol said as he got to his feet.

It was nearly dark by the time the meal was over and in less than an hour they were all asleep with the exception of Sol and Mat who were to take the first watch as Sol thought it best to keep a guard on during the night.

But the night passed without incident and, after an early breakfast, they started off across the open plain. It was a beautiful morning and they were all

in good spirits after their escape. The band of natives had trampled the grass down in a broad trail and, as it reached in the right direction, they found the going easy after their hard struggle through the jungle.

"I could stand a lot of this," George declared.

"Can't make me mad," Jack added.

"And here's hoping we don't have another run in with any more dark complexioned gentlemen," Bob chimed in.

"I reckon all the tribes that were coming this way came together yesterday," Sol told them.

It was nearly fifteen miles across the open space and it was just noon when they reached the edge of the forest. Here the growth differed greatly from that on the other side. In place of small trees growing closely together large ones grew far apart and the ground beneath their branches was almost free from undergrowth.

"Not so bad, eh?" Jack cried as he threw his pack to the ground and sat down.

"Looks good to me," George replied.

"But there's no knowing how long it'll last," Bob added.

"No hanging crêpe, now," Jack ordered.

"Not a hang," Bob laughed.

After dinner they plunged into the forest and all during the afternoon their way led beneath the wide spread branches of lofty trees over ground where

walking was nearly as easy as on a paved street. That night they camped on the shore of a lake that stretched away as far as they could see.

"Lake Tanganyika," Mat told them was the name of the lake and added that it was one of the largest in Africa.

"Then we'll have a chance to do some paddling for a change," Bob cried joyfully.

"I feel as though I'd like nothing better than to paddle the rest of my life," Jack laughed.

"And after you've paddled awhile you'll want to walk," Bob told him with a wink at George.

They got the canoes and everything all ready for an early start before they retired and the sun was just showing itself when they shoved off the next morning. Jack and Tom led the way and soon the others were far behind as Tom was one of the best men with a paddle the boys had ever seen and Jack was nearly as good.

"No good get too far," Tom cautioned after they had gone two or three miles.

"I guess you're right at that," Jack replied looking back. "We'll wait here till they come up.

"Look!"

Tom pointed toward the shore, some hundred yards distant and, as Jack turned, a wonderful sight met his gaze. Not less than a dozen huge elephants were sporting in the water near the bank.

"What do you know about that?" he gasped. "Look at the size of that nearest fellow, will you? I'll bet he's three feet taller than Jumbo ever was."

"Him good big," Tom agreed.

Good big is right. But is there any danger of them coming after us?"

"Not much."

"How big a much?" Jack demanded. "That big fellow'd make one mouthful of us boat and all."

"Them no catch us in canoe," Tom assured him and he felt much easier in his mind.

It was fifteen minutes before the other canoes caught up with them and during that time the elephants paid not the slightest heed to them but kept on blowing the water over their huge bodies.

"What do you think of those babies?" Jack called as Bob's canoe came up beside his.

"Some babies," Bob declared as he reached for his camera.

The light was just right and he got a number of good shots at the huge beasts.

"It seems strange that they don't pay any attention to us," George said.

"I guess they don't see men often enough to know what they are," Jack laughed.

"Them no hurt you you no hurt them 'cept sometimes," Mat told them as they started off again.

"And I'm glad this isn't one of the sometimes," Jack declared.

"Oh, I reckon we could paddle faster than they can swim," Bob told him.

"Maybe, but if we couldn't and they came for us—good night," Jack shuddered.

After this the canoes kept closer together and about an hour later they sighted a canoe coming down the lake toward them.

It was so far away that for some time they could not make out how many it carried, but, as it came nearer, they saw that it held but a single occupant. Soon they could see that the canoe was very narrow and was made from the trunk of a tree hollowed out. Over the side was an out rigging which served to keep it upright in the water. In the stern an old man, his skin so wrinkled that it looked like old parchment, wielded a paddle and, although he seemed to make but little effort, they could see that he was sending his canoe through the water at a very rapid rate.

"Great guns, but that fellow sure swings a wicked paddle," Jack declared.

"I'll say he does and see how easy he does it," Bob agreed.

"He must be a friendly guy because he's coming straight for us," George said.

The man was soon in easy speaking distance and they were surprised to hear him call out in what Jack called "good old United States":

"Hello, friends."

"He's a white man, sure's guns," Bob whispered.

"How are you?" Sol returned the greeting.

"Able to be round, thanks," the stranger said with a broad grin. And then he introduced himself. "My name's Jim Jones and I hail from Ohio U.S.A." he told them.

"Then I reckon you're a long ways from home." Sol reminded him.

"Some far Mr.—"

He paused and Sol introduced himself and boys.

"Well, I'm sure glad ter see yer. It's been more'n three year since I seen a white man. Yer see I live up the lake here 'bout three mile an' I live all alone. Have fer a matter o' twenty year."

"All alone for twenty years," Jack gasped.

"Seems like you must get lonesome," Sol suggested.

"Used ter, but yer kin get used ter most inything," the man smiled.

For some time they talked, Sol giving the man plenty of chances to tell them why he had lived so long far away from civilization but he did not accept any of them. Then, finally, Sol asked him if he had ever seen the man they had come so far to find.

"What'd yer say his name was?" he asked.

"Silas Lakewood," Sol told him.

"No, I never seen him."

"But you would have had he come this way," Sol insisted.

"Likely, but I sleep sometimes."

"Do you know of a lake called Oomsat?"

"Yep, it's 'bout two hundred mile north o' here. It's a small lake."

"Does a tribe live near it?"

"Yep."

"How large a tribe?"

"Not big, mebby fifty counting wimen an' kids."

"What kind are they, friendly?"

"Ter whites, yer mean?"

"Yes."

"No, they hate 'em."

"Why do they hate them?"

"I dunno, but they sure do. An' now I come ter think of it, I heard 'bout a month ago as how they had captured a white man. Mebby it's the one yer'er lookin' fur."

"I'll bet it is," Jack cried.

"Wouldn't wonder," the man told him. "Is he yer daddy?"

"He's my uncle," Jack told him.

"An' yer come way from America ter find him?"

"Yes, and we're going to find him if he's alive," Jack broke in.

"Wal, I shore hope ye do, but I dunno. Africa's a powerful big place ter hunt over."

"Have you ever been up to that lake?" Sol asked him.

"No, never have but I've heard of it. It's a small lake."

"Well, we're glad to have met you but I reckon we'd better be on our way," Sol finally said.

"I'll go 'long with yer if yer don't mind. I ain't got nuthin' ter do now days," the old man announced.

"We'll be glad to have you," Sol assured him, as he picked up his paddle.

Together they paddled up the lake and again the boys admired the ease with which the old man sent his crude craft through the water. With seemingly no effort at all he kept abreast of them when they were exerting all their force. He cordially invited them to stop and eat dinner with him when they reached his home, a small roughly built hut perched on a low bluff overlooking the lake. But, as it was only a little past nine o'clock when they reached the place, they explained that they could hardly spare the time. He did not urge them but waved them good-by with the remark that he might see them again before long.

"Queer duck, that," Bob said as soon as they were out of hearing.

"He's all of that if you ask me," Jack agreed.

"But he sure can paddle a canoe," Sol added.

"How old would you say he is?" George asked.

"Anywhere from eighty to a thousand," Bob laughed.

"I'll venture he isn't sixty," Sol said.

"Maybe not, but he looks it," Bob told them.

It was dark when they reached the upper end of the lake after paddling all day and they were glad to rest while the blacks got the camp ready for the night and prepared supper.

"I suppose you'll be glad to do some hiking now," Bob laughed, turning to Jack who had thrown himself on the ground.

"I'd rather paddle any day," Jack retorted. "And it looks as though we'd have some rough sledding to-morrow," he added.

"Does look kind of thick in there," Bob agreed turning to the heavy forest which began a few feet from the shore of the lake.

They had finished supper and Sol was smoking a last pipe when they were all startled by a cry which seemed to come from far off in the deep forest.

"What was that?" Jack demanded.

"I'll bite," Bob whispered.

Then the cry came again. Beginning in a low rumble in its pitch slowly rose until it was so shrill that it seemed as though the throat which made it must crack under the strain.

"What is it?" Jack again asked.

"You've got me," Sol confessed. "Hey, Mat, did you hear that cry?" he called to the black who was washing dishes.

"Me hear him."

They could detect a note of fear in the man's voice as he answered the question.

"Know what it is?" Sol demanded.

"No know."

"Any of the rest of you know?" Sol demanded.

But they all denied any knowledge as to the source of the cry which was repeated again and again.

"It's coming nearer," Bob declared.

"Every time," George agreed.

"Probably it's some kind of a bird," Sol tried to reassure them.

"Some bird that," Jack tried to speak cheerfully but knew that his attempt was a miserable failure.

"Didn't you ever hear it before, Mat?" Sol asked.

"Never," was the hesitating reply.

"Nor any of the rest of you?"

"No hear," Tom shook his head as did the others.

"And I thought I'd heard about every kind of a sound there is to hear," Sol mused.

"Well, whatever it is that's making it, it isn't very far away, let me tell you," Jack declared as the cry came again. It was so near now that it was almost earsplitting in its intensity and Bob afterward con-

fessed that he could feel every hair on his head standing upright.

"And we ought to know pretty soon what it is," George said.

"But I reckon we won't," Bob declared a moment later after the cry had come again. "That sounded as though it was going away."

That he was right was evident for the cry now rapidly receded and soon sounded as far away as when they had first heard it and finally died out altogether.

It's got me guessing," Sol said as he knocked the ashes from his pipe and declared it was time for bed.

"How about the pictures?" Jack asked. "The folks'll be getting worried if they don't hear from us pretty soon.

"I reckon you're right," Sol agreed. "Get it set up. It's just ten minutes to nine now and it'll keep us out of bed only a short time.

"They got the picture from home after sending for a short time and by half past nine all were asleep. It seemed to Jack that he had been asleep but a few minutes when he felt a violent tug at one of his feet.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded sleepily. "It's not time to get up yet."

"What are you talking about?" Bob grunted.

"What's the idea of pulling my leg?"

"Who pulled your old leg?"

"You did, of course."

"Didn't touch it."

"What?"

"I said I didn't touch your leg."

"Say," Jack was now sitting up and thoroughly awake. "Do you mean to say that you're in earnest?"

"Of course I am," Bob shot back. "What's the matter with you anyway?"

"Something pulled my leg," Jack insisted.

"Nonsense. You've been dreaming."

"Don't you believe it. I reckon I know when—"

"Oh, go to sleep and forget it." Bob interrupted.

"All right, but I guess I know when my leg's been pulled," Jack insisted.

He knew that he was right and that it had been no dream but he also realized that it would be impossible to convince Bob so he said nothing more. But it was a long time before he went to sleep again. Day was just breaking when he was again awakened and this time it was an excited voice in front of Sol's tent that disturbed him.

"Mr. Sol,'" he heard Mat say. "Somet'ing been here."

"What do you mean?" Sol asked, and Jack could hear him as he got up from his blankets.

"Me mean one canoe gone an' some grub."

"You sure?"

"Me sure. Me look all 'bout. No find 'em."

Bob was awake by this time and in a minute they were out of the tent to find a very scared negro jabbering so fast that they could hardly follow him.

"Take it easy," Sol said. "And tell me just what happened.

"No t'ing happen. Canoe an' some grub gone, that all."

"Did you hear anything last night?"

"No hear."

"Did anybody?" Sol demanded looking about at the whole company who were now all standing close by.

"Something pulled my leg," Jack announced after they had all declared that they had heard nothing.

"Pulled your leg?" Sol repeated.

"Yes, pulled my leg. I thought, of course, that it was Bob but he said he didn't."

"Never touched him," Bob declared.

"Sure you wasn't dreaming?" Sol asked.

"I know I wasn't."

"What time was it?"

"I don't know, but I don't think I'd been asleep very long," Jack told him.

"Well, let's see if we can find any tracks," Sol suggested.

"No tracks," Mat declared.

"You've looked."

"All over. No tracks," he insisted.

"Well, I reckon you could find them if anyone could but I'm going to take a look just the same."

They all took a hand in the search but, although they hunted for nearly half an hour, they found no trace of the intruder.

"This is a serious matter," Sol told them as they gave up the search. "We can get along with three canoes as they'll carry three but, if we should lose another one, we'd be in bad shape."

"But who could have taken it and left no mark?" Bob asked soberly.

"That's what we've got to find out."

"And the sooner the quicker, I'd say," George added.

"But how are we going to do it? It seems to me that's the big question just now," Jack said.

"We'll have to watch every minute. That's the only way," Sol told them.

"Is much of the grub gone?" Bob asked.

"Not much, some." Mat told him.

"Well, I'd like to—say, do you think it could have been that old man?" Jack changed his tone so suddenly that Bob laughed outright.

"Just struck you, eh?" he asked.

"I suppose you've been thinking it for a long while," he retorted.

"Well, it had occurred to me," Bob acknowledged.

"What do you think? Jack asked turning to Sol who was smoking his pipe just behind him.

"I wouldn't wonder," he said calmly.

"But have you any reason to think so besides just guessing?"

"Only that I don't see who else it could have been."

"But how about a native?"

"It's possible, of course," Sol acknowledged.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A CLOSE CALL

"THEN you don't think it would be best?"

Jack had proposed that they go back to the old hermit's camp in an effort to find their stolen property, but Sol had shaken his head.

"It would mean the loss of a day," he explained, "and it isn't as though we'd lost anything we can't get along without. And then again, if he took them he won't be likely to take anything more, so I don't think it's worth the time to say nothing of the risk. I tell you that old duffer's bad medicine."

"Sol's right, Jack," Bob said.

"I think so too," George agreed.

"I suppose he is," Jack reluctantly consented. "But I sure do hate to let him get away with it."

"And I don't blame you a bit, son, but sometimes, in this world, we have to do what seems best and not what we most want to do," Sol reminded him.

"But we'll keep a close watch all the time just the same," Bob suggested.

"We will that," Sol told them.

As they had feared from the looks of the forest they found it hard going although not so bad as

they had experienced and they were encouraged by the knowledge that they were nearing the end of their journey. They judged that they had made twenty-five miles when Sol called a halt by the side of a small stream of water. It was nearly six o'clock and they were all tired and ready to call it a day. Bob had, shortly after noon, shot a wild turkey and that night they had a supper which Jack declared was "fit for a king."

"Mat and I'll stand the first watch," Sol told them as they finished the meal.

"They all knew it would be useless to interfere so no one made any objection.

"Shall we wait up for the pictures?" Bob asked.

"I move no," Jack said quickly.

"Second the motion," George declared with emphasis.

"And I'll make it unaminous," Sol grinned.

So, shortly after eight o'clock the camp had, as Jack put it, "hit the hay."

They took three hour shifts on watch but the night passed and nothing happened.

"Seven more days at twenty-five miles a day ought to get us there," Jack said as they were eating breakfast.

"And we may do it in less," Bob declared optimistically.

"And then again it may take us twice that time," George added.

The forest continued without appreciable change and hour after hour they pressed on slowly, to be sure, but glad that it was no worse. It was shortly after they had eaten lunch that Jack, who at the time was walking close behind Bob and in front of George, suddenly caught hold of Bob's coat.

"Did you see it?" he whispered.

"See what?" Bob demanded.

"Just off there to the right I saw a man."

"You sure?"

"Sure as guns."

"A native?"

"Couldn't tell. I only got a glimpse of him."

"Probably it was a bird," Bob suggested.

"If it was it was a two legged one," Jack retorted.

"Most of them are."

"Well, you know what I mean," Jack snapped.

"Had we better tell Sol?"

"What do you think?"

"Well, I hardly—"

"Oh, of course if you think I didn't see anything," Jack interrupted.

"Now don't go off half cocked," Bob soothed him. "You know as well as I do that it's easy to be mistaken in a thing of that sort and you said you didn't get a good look at him."

They had been pushing on all the time they had been talking but now Bob slowed up long enough to let George catch up with them.

"Keep your eyes open," he told him. "Jack thinks he saw a man off to our right a minute ago."

"He did?"

"Well, I thought I did," Jack assured him. "Oh, I know I did, but Bob thinks it was only a bird."

Sol was some twenty paces ahead of them and now he called back:

"Getting tired?"

"No, but wait a minute," Bob replied as he hurried to catch up with him.

"Jack saw a man a minute ago," he stated as soon as he was up with him.

"Thinks he did, you mean," Jack added.

"Did you see him plainly?" Sol asked.

"For an instant and then he dodged behind a tree," Jack told him.

"What'd he look like? White or native?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't see him plainly enough to tell that," Jack had to confess.

They had stopped while talking and the blacks had also come to a halt as they were some thirty paces ahead. Sol called to Mat and when the man had come back to him he told him what had happened and said they would wait there while he did a little scouting.

"Take enough time to be sure but don't be gone any longer than is necessary," he ordered.

"You think I did see some one?" Jack asked as the black glided silently away.

"Sure I do," Sol assured him. "I know you've got keen eyes and," he added, "if there's anyone on our trail Mat'll find out."

"And it's better to be careful than sorry," Bob said.

"A whole lot better," George added.

A half hour passed.

"He's making a thorough search," Bob ventured.

"I told him to," Sol told him.

Nearly another half hour had gone before Mat returned and then he came so quietly that they were unaware that he was near until he stood before them.

"Well?" Sol demanded.

"Him was," Mat replied.

"More than one?"

"No more."

"White or black?"

"No can be sure. If he white he like black man."

"Then it wasn't a bird?" Jack broke in.

"No bird, man."

"You didn't see him?" Sol again took up the questioning.

"No could see. Him go quick."

"Thank he's gone for good?"

"No t'ink dat," the black shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you think it could have been the man we met on the lake?" Sol asked turning to Jack.

"I'm sorry but I can't say. It might have been and then again it might have been a native," Jack told him.

"I'm more inclined toward the latter," Sol told them. "I can't see why that fellow should follow us. He could have taken more that first time if he had wanted it, that is," he added, "provided it was he that took the stuff."

"Now I think of it," Jack began, "it seems to me he was too tall for that fellow but I'm not sure."

"Well, I reckon we might's well go on. But everyone keep an eye open," Sol said as he picked up his pack.

"If he thinks we saw him I'll bet we don't see him again," Jack said as they started off.

It was a little over an hour later when Bob, who was bringing up the rear, felt something lightly brush the tip of his nose. He instinctively jerked his head back and, as he did so, his eye caught sight of a tiny dart sticking in the smooth trunk of a small tree. Instantly he realized what it was and his heart seemed to stop beating as he thought of the narrow escape. A fraction of an inch and it would have struck him in the face.

"Down everybody," he shouted.

The others, stretched along for a distance of fifty or more feet, turned at the cry and, as Bob repeated the warning, fell to the ground.

"What's up?" Sol demanded.

"I almost got a dart in the face," Bob told him as he crept forward on his hands and knees.

"You mean it?"

Bob held out the dart which he had snatched from the tree trunk and he noted that Sol's bronzed face paled as he took it in his hand.

"Is—is it poisoned?" he asked.

"Looks like it," Sol replied as he examined the point. "How near did it come?"

"The feather brushed my nose."

"Great guns," Jack gasped.

"And little cannons," George echoed.

"It was a close call, son," Sol declared soberly. "That is if it's poisoned and it probably is."

They were lying close together on the ground their ears tuned to catch the slightest sound. The blacks, in a group by themselves but only a few feet away, were jabbering in an excited way.

"Here Mat," Sol called in a low tone."

The black crept swiftly up.

"Think that's poisoned?" Sol asked handing the dart to him.

He took it and, holding it about a foot from his eyes, looked long and steadily at it.

"Me no t'ink," he finally said.

"But you're not sure, eh?"

"Me be sure in a minute."

As he spoke he very carefully pressed the point of the dart onto the back of his hand.

"Careful there," Sol cautioned.

"Me know," the black man grinned.

For a full minute he watched the hand then he again pressed the point, this time a little harder.

"No poison," he announced a moment later as he jabbed the point into the back of his hand.

"That's what I call nerve," Jack gasped when the suspense was at an end.

"And I don't mean maybe," Bob agreed.

"How come it isn't?" Sol asked.

"No poison all dart. Mebby miss one, mebby two," Mat explained.

"Well, it's a relief to know they missed that one," Bob sighed.

"What had we better do?" Sol asked.

"We go get him. You stay here, eh?"

"You think you can find him?"

"Me t'ink so."

"Go to it then."

Mat motioned to the other blacks and in a moment they had disappeared in the depths of the forest.

"I don't like those blowguns. They're so confounded still," Jack declared after a moment's silence.

"They're worse than poison gas," George said with a slight shudder.

"Are they really as poisonous as you read they are?" Bob asked turning to Sol.

"Some of them are," Sol told them. "I saw a man struck by one and, in spite of all we could do, he was dead in less than five minutes."

"But what do you suppose was that fellow's object in shooting at me?" Bob asked.

"Most of these fellows don't have to have an object when they take a notion to do a thing," Sol explained. "That fellow probably has been following us all day and wants to steal what we've got."

"Then you don't think it's the old man of the lake?" George asked.

"Hardly. He wouldn't use a blowpipe, that is, I don't think he would, but he might at that. According to his own story he's been living out here long enough to learn how."

"What will they do if they find him?" Bob asked.

"I told them not to kill him if they could help it but I've an idea that they won't find him in a hurry," Sol told him.

"But I should think they'd be afraid he'd get them with that blowpipe," Jack said.

"Well, they say that familiarity breeds contempt and I reckon that's how it is with them. They've been used to them all their lives and so don't think so much of them as we do."

"I wish I knew that the fellow who shot that dart knew that it wasn't poisoned," Bob said, after a long pause in the conversation.

"How come?" Jack asked.

"Oh, I'd feel safer, that's all."

"How long'll they be gone?" Jack asked after another long period of silence.

"That's what I can't say," Sol told him. "But I told them to find him if it took two hours and I guess it's going to. They've been gone an hour now."

But at the end of another hour the blacks returned and, with downcast eyes, Mat acknowledged that they had failed.

"Him go like cat an' leave no trail," he complained.

"You could find no trace?" Sol asked.

"We find some trail just a minute, then we lose him two, three time, an' once more. Him devil."

"Well, in that case, I reckon there's nothing we can do except go on and keep our eyes open. We've only got about three hours left of the day."

They started off again and, to their great joy, the forest opened up to a considerable extent before they had gone far and, in spite of the delay, they estimated that they had made their twenty-five miles when Sol called a halt. They had seen nothing more of the mysterious shooter of darts and all

hoped that he had given up the chase. But that night, between two and three o'clock, while Jack and Tom were standing watch, they learned that their hope was vain.

It was a dark cloudy night and the boy was sitting with his back against the trunk of a tree and having hard work to keep awake when he heard a slight sound off to his right. Instantly he was wide awake and straining his ears. Tom was on the other side of the tree and he did not know whether the black was awake or asleep.

"Tom," he whispered.

There was no answer, and he dared not whisper louder.

"I guess he's asleep," he thought, and then he heard the sound again and now it was closer. Some animal, human or otherwise was creeping toward the camp. His first impulse was to give the alarm but then the thought came to him that the intruder would escape. If he could only catch him what a feather it would be in his cap. The great danger of the undertaking did not, at the moment enter his mind. If it was the man who had been dogging them, and he felt sure it was, he was going to put an end to his persistency.

With Jack to think was to act and in less than a minute from the time he had heard the first sound he was crawling on his stomach toward its source.

Not a sound did he make as he wormed his way inch by inch over the ground now crawling around a tree and now stopping to listen. Again he heard the faint sound of the breaking of a small stick and the thought passed through his mind that if it was a man he was not so skillful in his movements as he would have expected a native to be.

"I suppose he thinks we're all asleep," he thought as he inched his body along. "If he's doing his best not to make a sound I can beat him hands down at it."

But he had reckoned without his host for, hardly had the thought passed through his mind when a form seemed to materialize directly in front of him and not more than three feet away. He had no time for thought beyond the realization that it was a man for, before he could even get to his knees, the unknown had him by the throat and stifled the cry which he strove to utter.

The man's grip was a firm one and, for an instant, the boy thought that his time had come. For a second he lay perfectly still and the man, doubtless thinking that he had his enemy at his mercy, raised his body slightly. It was the move Jack had hoped for and, quickly drawing up his legs, he kicked out with all his strength. The result was perfectly satisfactory for the man, taken entirely by surprise, was hurled over backward and fell with a deep grunt.

With a loud yell Jack was upon him before he could recover and, in an instant, they were locked in each others arms. But almost immediately the boy realized that he was no match for the man when it came to a rough and tumble. Although he knew many holds with which the man was doubtless entirely unfamiliar the man's prodigious strength rendered them unavailing. Once he secured a beautiful half Nelson only to have it broken apparently with perfect ease and, a second later, he was again underneath and the man's hands were clasped about his neck. Try as he might he could not break the hold and he felt his senses leaving him. But help was close at hand and, just as he was about to give up the fight, he was conscious of a dull thud close to his ear and immediately the grip on his throat relaxed and the weight rolled from his body.

"Me get him," he heard Tom's voice mutter.

"And I'm telling you that you didn't get him a second too soon," Jack gasped as he struggled to his feet at the same time drawing the blessed air into his lungs.

"Him knocked out," Tom said as he helped him to his feet.

"You hit him?" he asked.

"Me hit him."

"Well, I don't care if you killed him. Is it—?"

"Him nigger," Tom announced bending over the

unconscious man. "Him bad one, heap strong."

"You said a mouthful that time, old man," Jack declared rubbing his throat which, as he afterward told Bob, felt as though his Adam's apple had been permanently dislocated.

"What's up?"

The question came from Sol's tent.

"We've got him," Jack called back.

"Got who?"

That was Bob's voice.

"Who do you suppose? The fellow that's been following us, of course," Jack snapped.

By this time all the party were out of their tents and all were asking questions at the same time.

"Sign off and I'll tell you all about it," Jack laughed.

"But is it—? Bob began.

"No, it's a native," Jack interrupted.

"Is he dead?" Sol asked.

"I don't care much whether he is or not," Jack told him.

"Him no dead," Tom put in.

"Well, tell us about it," George demanded.

"I will if you'll give me a chance," Jack retorted and proceeded to give them an account of what had happened.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," Bob muttered as soon as he had finished.

"I reckon," Jack laughed.

"But why didn't you call us?" Sol asked.

"Afraid he'd get away."

"But he might have finished you," Bob declared.

"I—I guess I didn't stop to think of that," Jack confessed.

"Well, you did a good job anyhow," Sol told him.

"You mean Tom did."

"I reckon we'll have to give the credit to both of you. But he's coming around and now the question is what'll we do with him."

"Here's his blowpipe," George said as he picked up a slender tube about five feet in length a few feet to one side.

"Snap it," Jack ordered, and George obeyed.

"He won't shoot any more darts with that gun," he said grimly as he threw the pieces away.

The native was moaning and, as Bob threw the rays from his flash light on his face, he saw that his eyes were open and in them he read a look of malevolent hatred.

"Speak to him, Mat," Sol ordered.

Mat tried him in a dozen different dialects but if the man understood any of them he gave no sign.

"Him no talk," Mat shook his head in disgust.

"You think he understands?" Sol asked.

"No can tell. Me t'ink so."

"What'll we do with him?"

"Me kill him?"

"No, we can't do that," Sol said slowly.

"Him no good," Mat persisted.

"I reckon that's a pretty good estimate of his value but, at the same time, he's human, you know."

"But him kill us," Mat persisted.

'Not if we see him first," Jack laughed.

"However that's not deciding what to do with him," Sol declared as he looked at the native who was sitting with his back against a tree seemingly indifferent as to his fate.

"What can we do except let him go?" George asked.

"Nothing, I reckon, but first we'll see what he's got in that little bag," Sol replied.

Tied to his waist the native carried a small pouch made of some kind of skin and he offered no resistance when Mat took it from him. It was nearly filled with small darts similiar to the one which had so nearly struck Bob in the face. They were constructed of a very hard and very sharp thorn the larger end being fitted with two tiny feathers which guided its flight. There were fully fifty of these missiles and, after a careful examination, Mat declared that every one was poisoned.

"And the one he shot at you was the only un-

poisoned one he had. Can you beat it?" Jack gasped.

"But it might not have been he who shot at me," Bob suggested.

"It probably was, though," George declared.

"Try him again, Mat," Sol ordered.

But, although Mat jabbered at him for several minutes, he might as well have been talking to a stone post so far as results were concerned. If the man understood him he gave not the slightest sign of it and, finally, Mat gave it up with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Him fool," he declared.

"I'm not so sure of that," Sol told him. "Tell him we're going to let him go. That ought to get a rise out of him.

But if he understood he gave no sign of it and it was not until Mat made gestures so plain that they were unmistakable that he gave any evidence of comprehending his meaning. Then he rose slowly to his feet and a look of incredulity stole over his face as he looked from one to the other. Slowly he edged away from them and suddenly he was gone.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," Bob declared after a moment of silence.

"I only hope it's permanent," Sol sighed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE END OF THE TRAIL

A WEEK passed and they knew they must be near the end of their journey although just how near they, of course, could only guess. It had been a hard week as, for the most part, their way had led through dense woods and several times they had been obliged to make long detours to avoid marshes which were impassable. Every night they had kept a guard but, since Jack's adventure, they had been unmolested. They had seen but little large game during the week, although sounds of large beasts had often been heard only a short distance away. But game was not their object and they made no effort to do any shooting.

It was at the close of a particularly hard day and they had eaten their supper when Sol announced:

"Boys, according to my reckoning we must be pretty near that lake. At any rate we've gone as far as I dare. You see, we're likely to stumble on some of that tribe most any time and that's just what we don't want to do as it would be fatal to our plans. Now to-morrow we're going to stay right here and let two of the boys, Mat and Tom, try to

locate the lake and the tribe for us. They can do it a good deal better than we could and with far less risk."

"Can't make me mad," Jack grinned.

"And we've got to have patience," Sol went on. "If they've got your uncle and are keeping him a prisoner they're doing it for some purpose and it's not going to be an easy thing to get him away from them.

"Have you any plan for doing it?" Bob asked.

"Not yet," Sol told him. "It's no use to make plans until we know something about the lay of the land. We've got to locate the tribe first and see if they've got him and how they're holding him and a dozen other things before we can make any plans to get him away."

"That's the only way, of course," Bob agreed.

"It may take two or more days but this is a case where we've got to be sure of things before we go ahead," Sol explained.

Although they chafed somewhat with the unaccustomed inactivity they knew that the rest would do them good and, after the newness wore off they found that they were actully enjoying themselves.

"Loafing isn't so bad once in a while," Jack yawned as he stretched himself on the ground just outside his tent.

"Not when it's legitimate," Bob agreed.

"Which seems to be the case just now," George added.

"But I hope they get back soon and bring good news with them," Sol told them as he slowly filled his pipe.

"You said something," Bob declared.

Slowly the morning wore away and soon after dinner the boys, Jack especially, began to show signs of uneasiness.

"Wish there was some place to go fishing," he said.

"Well, there isn't," Bob told him.

"Bet I could find one."

"And I'll bet you're not going to try," Sol informed him. "You're going to stay right here where I can keep an eye on you."

"Yes, sir," Jack replied meekly.

"How about a story," George suggested. "You must have had a lot of experiences in your travels."

"I have," Sol replied.

"Then please tell us something exciting," Jack requested.

Sol was an excellent story teller once he got started and for more than two hours he entertained them with accounts of his adventures in many lands.

Supper time came almost before they were aware of it and they had hardly finished the meal before the two blacks returned. They came silently as they

had gone and no one was aware of their nearness until they stood before them.

"You got back sooner than I expected," Sol greeted them.

"We get back," Mat announced.

"And you found them?"

"We find them."

"How far away?"

"Twenty-five mile, mebby little more."

"Big tribe?"

"Some big, mebby fifty men."

"They didn't see you?"

"No see."

"Good. Did you see the white man?"

"No see."

The boys were disappointed at the answer to the last question but Sol went on:

"What kind of fellows are they?"

"Them little men."

"Pigmies?"

"How?"

"I mean are they very small?"

"So big." Mat held out his hand to show that they were about five feet tall.

"Many women?"

"Much."

"And children?"

"More much."

"How long did you watch them?"

"Not long. We get back tell you."

"That's right. Are they hunters?"

"Them hunt some."

"Then we'd better not get too near, eh?"

"Not too much near."

"But we can move camp some nearer, you think?"

"We go some nearer," Mat agreed.

"To-night?" Jack asked eagerly.

"No to-night. Too bad go."

They broke camp early the next morning and traveled until nearly noon, when Mat told them that they had better not get any nearer.

"Them only five six mile," he said.

"Gee, but I'd like to see those two fellows go through these woods when they're by themselves," Jack said to Bob a few minutes later. "They left yesterday later than we did and went several miles further and got back before dark. Some hiking if you ask me."

"I reckon we keep them down to about half speed," Bob said.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" George asked.

"What's your idea?" Sol demanded.

"I'd say we ought to find out if Uncle is there first thing," Bob volunteered.

"Of course," Jack broke in. "But how are we going about it?"

"Do you suppose they're hostile?" George asked.

"More'n likely," Sol told him. "Most of the pigmies are. I'd much rather it had been some other tribe. The smaller they are the more savage they seem to be. At least that's been my experience."

"Then we've got to be careful," Bob suggested.

"Careful is right," Sol assured him. "If they see us first I wouldn't give a plugged nickel for our chances of doing anything and we'd be lucky to get away with a whole skin, let me tell you."

"But we've got to find out some way," Jack declared. "And we can't do it by sitting here."

"Well, I'm afraid that's about what we'll have to do for awhile," Sol told them.

"But—"

"Oh, I don't mean we'll be doing nothing," Sol interrupted. "But we've got to leave it to Mat to find out if he's there. He can do it without getting caught if anyone can."

"But when?" Bob asked.

"To-night, I reckon."

"Gee, but I'd like to go with him," Jack declared.

"Nothing doing," Sol laughed. "He'll have all he can attend to to look out for himself."

"I suppose so," Jack grumbled.

Mat left the camp shortly before dark and there was nothing for the others to do except wait. At nine o'clock they sent pictures but, for some reason, they failed to receive any in return.

"What's up, I wonder?" Jack asked after they had waited for some minutes after signing off.

"Now don't get fussed," Bob counseled. "It might be any number of things."

"But it's the first time it's failed," Jack complained.

"I know, but maybe they're out."

"But they ought not to be at nine o'clock."

"Well, maybe it's something else. Maybe something's the matter with their end of the set."

They waited for nearly an hour but nothing came through and finally they gave it up.

"How long do you expect Mat'll be gone?" Bob asked as he finished putting the set away.

"No telling," Sol told him. "But it probably'll not be before sometime to-morrow, so you boys might as well get to bed. I'll take first watch."

Mat had not returned when morning came and, as the day wore away, the boys became more and more impatient.

"I'll go bugs if we don't get some action before long," Jack declared shortly after dinner.

"Too much pent up energy," Bob laughed.

"You're like a fish out of water yourself," Jack retorted, "only you're better at covering it up than I am."

"I reckon you'll get all the action you want before we're through," Sol told them, "and, maybe, a little bit more," he added softly.

"Well, lead me to it," Jack laughed.

That night, Mat having not returned, they tried again to get a picture from home. But again they met with no success, although Bob and Jack had put in considerable time during the day going over every part of the set.

"Must be something wrong at the other end," Bob declared after they had waited till nearly ten o'clock.

"I reckon," Jack sighed.

"And I sure do miss it," Bob told them.

"And I wish Mat would get back," Jack added.

He had hardly spoken the words before the black was standing directly in front of them.

"Well, I'll be switched," he gasped.

"Me come," Mat announced.

"Have you seen him?" Sol asked.

"Me see white man."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Well, tell us about it. But first can you describe him?" Sol asked.

"You mean what him like?"

"Yes, that's it, what's he like?"

"Him big up and down an' little across."

"You mean he's tall and thin?"

"That him."

"Uncle is tall but he's not thin, that is, he wasn't," Bob broke in.

"But they may be half starving him," Jack suggested.

"It's more'n likely," Sol agreed. "But go on and tell us how you saw him," he added turning back to the black man.

"Me hide up in tree an' wait long time. Men an' women come an' go all time. Me wait long time till way off on other side clear place one man him come out of hut an' lead white man till him come nearer. Me no sure at first till him come most to tree an' den me see him white man an'—"

"You say the man was leading him?" Bob interrupted.

"Him lead him," Mat repeated.

"But how?"

"Him have rope round neck. Him lead him dat way."

"The brute. I'd like to get my hands on him for just about a minute," Jack said, his eyes snapping fire.

"But what did he do then?" Sol asked.

"Him tie him to tree an' leave him."

"Alone?"

"Leave him alone. Den white man him sink down like him sick. Him very thin dis way. No get 'nough eat, mebby."

"But why did he tie him to a tree?" Bob asked.

"Me no know. Him tie him to big tree."

"Was he near you?" Jack asked.

"Some near, not far."

"How long did they keep him there?"

"Me no know. Me come away after while."

"Do you think they keep him in the hut he came out of?"

"Me t'ink so."

"And is it on the edge of the village?"

"It near edge. Not far."

"But not on the very edge? How many huts between it and the woods?"

"One, mebby two. No see very well so far."

"Hum, that's not so good," Sol mused. Then, after a moment's pause, he asked: "About how large is the clearing?"

"Not big. Mebby hundred strides," Mat replied.

"You mean a hundred steps across it?" Bob asked.

" 'Bout that."

After another short pause Sol dismissed the black and then turned to the boys.

"Well?"

"I hope so," Jack smiled.

"Hope what?" George asked.

"Hope it's well, of course."

"He's probably kept in that hut during the night and brought out in the daytime and tied to the tree for the women and children to poke fun at," Sol

told them. "But the big question is how closely he's guarded during the night. We can't do a thing in the day time, that's certain, and so it has to be during the night."

"You mean some one has got to sneak in and get him out?" Jack asked.

"You guessed it."

"It seems the only way to me," Bob agreed.

"Same here," George added. "But who's to go?"

"I'll go." Bob and Jack made the statement together but Sol shook his head.

"Mat's the man for the job," he told them.

"But don't you consider it dangerous?" Bob asked.

"Very much so."

"Then I don't think it's up to Mat at all. It isn't his uncle you know."

"I know but he's the man for it just the same. You see, it's a job which will require all the skill in the world and when it comes to skill of that sort he's the king bee all right. He can pull it off where you or I would be almost certain to fail."

"But I don't feel right to ask another man, even if he is a black man, to take a risk I wouldn't take myself," Bob objected.

"That's all right so far as it goes," Sol said soberly, "but it doesn't go but a little ways in this fix. It's a question of your uncle's life."

"And you think Mat could do it better than we?" Bob asked.

"I think he would be a ten to one shot compared to any of us. Remember he's lived in the jungle nearly all his life and he can go most anywhere without making a sound. Did any of you hear him when he came back? And there was no need of silence then but he's used to it. Then again, if he should be discovered, he could escape a hundred per cent easier than could any one of us."

"Then you think it's the right thing to ask him to make the attempt?" Bob asked.

"By all means."

"Then that settles it so far as I'm concerned."

"Same here," Jack agreed.

"But I'd offer him fifty dollars to make the attempt and a hundred if he succeeds," Sol said.

"By all means. But do you think that's enough?"

"I think so. He'll think he's being paid out of all proportion to the danger."

"And he'll go to-night?"

"He's had no sleep and he'll need all his strength so I don't think we'd better tell him to go to-night, although he'd go all right, if we said so, for that money."

"I think Sol's right," Jack declared. The better shape he's in the better chance he'll have of pulling it off."

"Then, perhaps, we'd better not say anything to him until morning," Sol advised.

Again that night attempts to get a picture from home failed and both Bob and Jack were much concerned, but there was nothing they could do having made certain that their part of the outfit was all right.

"Something's wrong somewhere," Jack declared after they had waited the better part of an hour with no results.

"I wonder it they're getting us," Bob said.

"I doubt it because if they are they know that we're not getting them all right."

"Well, the only thing we can do is to keep trying each night till we do get them."

Soon after breakfast the following morning the proposition was explained to Mat and he accepted the commission with eagerness.

"Me get him," he declared.

He started off soon after dinner and there was nothing the rest of them could do except wait till he returned.

"I wish I could have gone with him," Jack sighed as he watched him disappear in the dense forest.

"I feel the same way," Bob declared, "but, of course, we wouldn't want to do anything to make it any harder for him."

"Of course not," Jack agreed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FOUND

THAT was probably the longest afternoon the boys had ever known and everyone was glad when the time came to go to bed. It was a long time before sleep came to Bob and Jack and they tossed and talked by turns discussing over and over again Mat's chances for success. They were up at daybreak and watching the forest for Mat's return, although Sol had warned them that it might be several days before they saw him again.

"He may have to wait several nights before he gets his chance," he had told them.

Breakfast time came and went and he had not returned and Jack especially was as uneasy as the proverbial fish out of water. Up and down in front of the tents he paced until Bob threatened to "punch his head" if he did not "cut it out."

"You give me the willies," he added.

"Well, I wish he'd come," Jack retorted.

"And I don't suppose any of the rest of us do."

"Well, if you do you aren't showing it any."

Dinner time came and went with no sign of the absent man. When two o'clock came Sol told them

that there was little chance of him coming before the next day.

"If he'd gotten him last night he'd have been here by this time," he explained.

"But he might be so weak that he'd have to carry him and that would make it take him longer," Jack declared hopefully.

"There's a chance that you're right, of course," Sol acknowledged.

"How about taking Tom and following him up?" Jack suggested.

"Nothing doing," Sol told him.

"But he may be in trouble and need us."

"If he is we couldn't help him I tell you."

"How do you know that?" Jack demanded.

"What do you think we could do against that band of savages?"

"Well, we might do something."

"We could get caught and that's about all."

"But do you mean that you're going to stay here and do nothing if he doesn't come back?"

"No, I don't mean that. If he doesn't return in three days we'll have to do something, of course. But we've got to give him time."

"Three days, why not make it three years and be done with it," Jack retorted.

"Patience, my boy, patience," Sol said in a kindly tone. "There are times in this life when we've just

got to hang on and wait and I reckon this is one of them."

"I know, but it's mighty hard sometimes," Jack declared.

Night came and went and when the morning broke Mat was still absent. Jack's impatience had not abated at all but, since Sol's rebuke, he had tried his best to keep from showing it. But the older man knew the struggle which was going on in the young life and pitied him although he could do nothing to help him. Then, just as they were about to eat dinner, Mat stood before them. But he was alone.

"Didn't you get him?" Jack demanded.

"No git." The black hung his head and barely whispered the words.

"Why not?"

"No could git."

"But—"

"Suppose you let him tell us in his own way," Sol interrupted.

"Me see him," Mat began and then hesitated.

"Yes, go on," Sol encouraged.

"Him got four men watch him hut all night. Them no go sleep. Me no git him."

The black was plainly in great distress of mind as he haltingly announced his failure.

"It's strange," Sol declared.

"What's strange?" Bob asked.

"That they should watch him so closely. Why don't they just tie him at night and let it go at that?"

"Looks to me as though they were expecting some one to make an attempt at rescuing him," Jack said.

"That's what I was thinking," Sol agreed.

"But who can they be expecting?" Bob asked.

"You think they're afraid some other tribe will get him away from them?" Sol asked turning to Mat.

"Me t'ink so."

"Do you know of any other tribe near here?"

"No know."

"We've got to find some way," Jack burst out after a short pause.

"Of course," Sol agreed.

"But what?" Bob asked soberly.

"Me go back, try more," Mat said still hanging his head.

"To-night?" Bob asked.

"To-night."

"Let me go with him," Jack begged turning to Sol.

"If you go I'm going also," Bob declared.

"How about it, Mat? Think they could be of any use?" Sol asked the black man.

"No t'ink."

"Thank again, old man," Jack said. "How do you know we couldn't do something? We've been in the woods before, let me tell you. Can't we go Sol?"

"Will you take them?" Sol asked.

"Me take 'em you say so."

"Well, I don't know what to say. It would be a mistake for too many to go. I think the best plan would be for me to go with Mat.

Jack's face fell and Sol saw that the boy was terribly disappointed.

"Tell you what we'll do," he said after a moment's pause. "We'll all go. Oh, I know I said it wasn't the thing to do but one failed and I know he'd have made good if any one man could have and maybe all together we'll succeed where one failed.

"Now you're shouting," Jack cried. "Come on. Let's make it snappy."

"Now don't you go to going off half cocked, young man, or we'll leave you behind," Sol cautioned.

"Fat chance," Jack laughed. "But aren't we going to start right off," he asked.

"We've got to eat dinner first and get packed up," Bob told him.

"And we've got to make haste slowly from now on, let me tell you," Sol added.

Dinner was eaten in a hurry and everyone pitched in and helped with the packing as they wished to get started as soon as possible in hopes of reaching the villages before dark.

"What's your idea?" Bob asked Sol as the latter was folding his tent.

"Haven't any. We'll just have to go it blind until we see which way the wind blows. But something tells me that we'll get a chance sooner or later."

"That's what Jack'd call a hunch."

"I reckon."

It was just two o'clock when they started and the boys were in high spirits. Here at last was action and action was what they craved. But they could not help noting that Sol was very sober. The older man knew far better than they what they were up against and he feared that he was doing wrong to take them into what he knew was grave danger. But, on the other hand, a life depended on it and he felt that the risk must be taken.

The long rest had done them good and they made rapid progress and just before seven o'clock Mat announced that the settlement was only a mile away.

"Then I reckon we're near enough to camp. What do you think, Mat?" Sol asked.

"Me t'ink so."

"Then we'll stop right here. It's a good place for

a camp and as soon as we've had something to eat we'll see what's to be done."

They did not dare light a fire so they had to content themselves with cold food but no one minded it.

"I've got an idea," Jack announced as they were eating.

"Let's hear it," Sol said.

"It seems to me a good plan but maybe you won't agree with me," Jack said slowly.

"Well, spring it anyhow," Bob said impatiently.

"Well, how would it do for one of us to set one of the huts, on the other side from where he is, on fire. That would probably bring them all out and then we could grab him and beat it."

"But they'd find it out and catch us before we got very far," George declared.

"Seems to me they'll be likely to do that no matter how we get him," Jack told them. "I reckon it's a chance we've got to take in any event. How about it Sol?"

"I reckon you're right, son, and your plan seems to me to be a pretty good one. It'd give us as good a start as any probably," Sol replied.

"When had we better spring it?" Jack asked.

"Wait'll I see what Mat says," Sol said, and he called the black to him and told him of the suggested plan.

"Dat good," Mat nodded his head.

"You think it'll work?" Sol asked him.

"Mebby."

"And when will be the best time would you say?"

"When him git dark. Them no come after us so well in the dark."

"Just what I thought," Sol told him.

"Which side of the place is he on?" Bob asked.

"This side," Mat told him.

"You can tell which hut he's in?"

"Him no change, me tell."

"Then I think we'd better let Tom go around and set the fire. He can get through the woods faster than any of us and catch up with us before we've gone far," Sol suggested.

"Dat good," Mat agreed.

Dusk had already fallen and by the time Mat had explained the plan to the other black it was time to start. They planned to wait on the very edge of the village until the fire was well under way. Then, if the hut in which the captive was held was left unguarded, Mat would go and bring him out to them and they would at once make off. In case the guards remained at the hut they would all rush them and take him by force trusting to the element of surprise to enable them to put it over.

"I do hope that it'll work so that they'll leave him unguarded," Bob whispered as they started.

"Because if they don't some one's likely to get hurt," Jack added.

"And I'd much rather no one did, not even one of them. You see, in spite of the fact that they've probably been pretty cruel to Uncle Si, I can't feel any real animosity toward them as they undoubtedly are living according to their lights."

"Well, maybe so, but they'd better get a new style of illumination, according to my way of thinking," Jack told him.

The two boys were bringing up the rear with Sol and George a few feet ahead of them while the blacks, as usual were leading. There was no moon as the sky had become overcast late in the afternoon and now threatened rain. The darkness deepened rapidly and, when Mat called a halt and told them that they were only a few rods from the settlement, they could hardly see a foot ahead.

"No dare get nearer," he told them.

"Then Tom had better start off at once," Sol told him. "Has he got everything?"

"Him got. Him go."

"Tell him to be careful."

"Him know. Him go slow."

"Hope it doesn't rain," Jack whispered after Tom had slipped away.

"Rain heap fire no burn," Mat told him.

"You think it will?"

"T'ink no, but no can tell."

"I'll bet it'll rain inside of two hours," Sol whispered.

"Well, if it holds off that long we ought to make it all right," Bob told him.

"No rain two hour," Mat assured them.

"Here's hoping," Bob whispered.

"Wonder what kind of a fire department they've got?" George said after a moment's pause.

"They're mighty careful about fire," Sol told them. "They know that if one gets to going they'll have mighty hard work putting it out so it isn't very often they have one."

"Them no like fire," Mat added.

"Well, there isn't any wind to speak of so it won't be likely to spread any," George added.

"Which may and may not be a bad thing for us," Sol said soberly.

"Why should that make any difference to us?" Bob asked.

"Well, if more than one hut got on fire it would take them longer to fight it and that would give us that much more of a start on them."

"Sure it would," Jack broke in. "Let it blow all it wants to."

There was silence for some minutes and then Jack asked:

"Most time we were getting a little action, isn't it?"

"Him come most any time now," Mat told him.

Just then came the shrill call of some kind of bird unknown to any of the boys.

"What kind of a bird is that?" Bob asked.

"That no bird, that Tom," Mat told him. "Him give signal him set fire."

"Then there ought to be something doing pretty soon," Jack said getting up and trying to pierce the darkness.

He could see nothing but, a few minutes later, they heard a startling cry only a short distance away followed by another and still another.

"Reckon they've got a thrill," Jack chuckled.

"And we may get one before the night's over," Bob reminded him.

By this time it was evident that the village was in a condition of frenzy. Although they could see nothing they could hear a tumult of sounds which told them plainly that Tom must have succeeded in setting fire to the hut.

"Reckon we'd better give them about ten minutes more, Mat," Sol said.

"Dat be 'bout right," the black agreed.

It seemed to all three boys that ten minutes had never been so long in passing but finally Sol gave the word for Mat to go forward and get the lay of the land.

"If there's anyone there try and not let them see

you but come back and let us know and we'll rush them," was his order.

"Me do," and the black was gone.

"Hope he does find everyone gone to the fire," Sol declared.

"I can see it," Jack said. "Look through the trees."

"Guess he made a good job of it," Bob said as the light grew brighter and the sound of the crackle of burning sticks became plainly audible even above the shouts of the natives.

Sol's hope failed to materialize for Mat was back in less than ten minutes with the news that the tent, which he supposed held the prisoner, was guarded by two natives.

"Me no know what dey t'ink but dey dar," he told them.

"Well, the quicker we get going the better," Sol told him.

"That's where we live," Jack said jumping to his feet. "Let's go."

"Just a minute, son. We want to know just what we're going to do so there'll be no slip up. Now, my idea is for you three boys to hang back a bit while the rest of us creep up on them and jump them. Then if we need any help you can be Jonnie on the spot."

"Yes, and probably not get in on it at all," Jack grumbled.

"Sol knows best," Bob advised.

"I suppose he does," Jack acknowledged reluctantly. "But remember this, you won't have to call us but once."

"I'll remember it," Sol assured him. Now then, let's go and you boys keep only a few feet behind us. Mat says he saw only two natives but there may be more than that there."

In two or three minutes they reached the edge of the clearing and now they could see the blazing hut on the other side not more than a hundred yards away. Around it was a confused mass of natives shouting and leaping seemingly beside themselves.

"Tent right there," Mat whispered pointing to a dimly visible shape only a few feet from where they crouched.

"Then you boys stay here and don't move till we come back unless we call you," Sol ordered.

Dropping on their stomachs Sol and the three blacks began working themselves forward while the boys waited with bated breath. Slowly the minutes passed. The uproar from the other side of the village continued undiminished and the flames shooting upward testified to the fact that Tom had done his work well.

"They must be there by this time," Jack whispered.

"Seems so," George replied.

"They're probably waiting a chance to jump them," Bob added.

"Well, I hope they don't have to wait long," Jack said. "This suspense is something terrible."

They did not for, hardly had he spoken, when a blood-curdling yell rang out above the din caused by the fire fighters. For an instant no one spoke. Then Bob whispered:

"That came from the hut."

"Sure did. What do you suppose it means?" Jack returned.

"Sounded to me like a call for help," George declared.

"Think we'd better investigate," Bob asked taking a step forward in his eagerness.

"There's no better about it," Jack told him, "we're going to."

"But Sol told us not to come unless he—" George began but Jack interrupted.

"But maybe he can't call. Come on, let's go."

"I think we'd better," Bob said and they hesitated no longer.

As they crept up to the hut, a tepee shaped affair some fifteen feet in diameter, they could hear sounds which told them that a fight of some kind was going on inside. Sounds indicating the impact of a fist would be followed by a heavy grunt.

"Sounds as though they were having a regular knock down and drag out," Bob whispered.

"And I'm afraid our side isn't getting all the best of it," Jack whispered back."

"That's where we come in," Bob told him.

They stole around the hut until they came to the opening, a narrow passage hardly wide enough for one man to squeeze through. Bob went in first and it seemed to him that the place was a maelstrom of struggling men although it was so dark he could see nothing. Hardly had he reached the inside before some one brushed violently against him and all but knocked him off his feet.

The boys had their automatics in their hands but in the darkness there was, of course, no chance to use them except as clubs and even so a light would be necessary to enable them to distinguish friend from foe. So as Bob scrambled to his feet he shouted:

"Turn on your flash, George."

The first thing which the light disclosed was Sol rolling over and over with a black man first one on top and then the other. They were close to him and, while George held his light on them, Bob waited until a woolly head appeared and then, clutching the barrel of his revolver, he struck. With a heavy groan the native let go his hold and Sol sprang to his feet.

"There's only three more of them," he shouted. "But how they can fight."

"Dey goin' get away."

That was Mat's voice and, even as he shouted,

they were conscious of the sound of bare feet pattering on the ground and, as George played his light about the hut, they saw that there was no one there but themselves.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," Jack cried.

"But where's Uncle Si?" Bob demanded.

"He's over here."

The answer came from one side of the hut and, as George flashed his light in that direction, they say a man stretched out on a bed of dry rushes. Bob, with a cry of joy, sprang toward him but, as he bent over him, started back with a sigh of disappointment for the emaciated creature lying there bore no resemblence to his uncle.

"You—you—" he stammered.

"Bob."

The sound of his name dispelled all doubts and he was about to kneel beside him when Sol's voice rang out.

"No time for any talk now. Can he walk?"

"Only a few steps, I fear," Mr. Lakewood said in a weak voice.

"Pick him up, Mat, and make it snappy," Sol ordered. "Now we've got to beat it. They'll be after us any minute."

The black picked the man up in his arms as though he were a child and in another minute they were making the best time possible back to where they had left their packs.

They had left everything in readiness for the quickest possible start and no unnecessary words were spoken as they swung their packs onto their backs.

"Mat'll have to leave his load where it is as he's got to carry Mr. Lakewood," Sol declared as they were ready to start.

"But can't I—?" Bob began but Sol cut him short.

"No, you can't carry double nor can anyone. We've got to make fast time and we've all got enough and besides we can get along without it. Let's go."

Two of the blacks led the way and Mat followed next with his burden slung over his back. Then came Sol with the three boys close to his heels. All through the long dark night they kept on without stopping except, about once an hour, long enough to allow Mat to change loads with one of the other blacks. Hardly a word was spoken during the entire march as all realized that every ounce of energy must be conserved. That the savages would set out after them as soon as their escape was discovered was a certainty and all through the night they expected every moment to hear the sounds of pursuit.

Finally, when it seemed to the boys that they could not possibly go another rod without rest, the

first sign of the coming dawn shone through the trees and, a half hour later, Sol gave the order to stop for breakfast. Coffee was quickly made but the rest of the meal was eaten cold. Mr. Lakewood stood the march well and assured them that, aside from his weakness due to lack of food, he was all right. He started to tell them something of his experience but Sol suggested that it would be better to wait.

"You'll need all your strength before we get through, I'm thinking," he said.

"And I know you're right."

"Wonder where Tom is," Jack said as they were eating.

"I expect he'll show up before long," Sol told him.

He came just as they were about to start again and told them that two of the huts had been burned.

"Have they started after us yet?" Sol asked him.

"No t'ink but dey come soon."

It was now fully light and they were able to make much faster time but, although each kept his spirits up for the sake of the others, they all knew that their chances of getting away unscathed were practically nil. They knew that, unencumbered as they would be, the savages would make two miles to their one and it was only a matter of time when they would be overtaken. Beyond that they dared not think.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BIG ALLIES

ALL day they pushed on, stopping only when absolutely necessary, and when Sol decided to call it a day shortly after five o'clock, he estimated that they were all of twenty-five miles from the village.

"A few miles more or less isn't going to make any great difference so far's I can see," he said as he swung his pack to the ground. "And I reckon we're all about to the end of our strength."

"What I don't understand is why they haven't caught up with us before this," Bob said. "What do you make of it?"

"It's beyond me," Sol told him shaking his head. "I expected they'd be up with us before this."

Somewhat to their surprise their uncle seemed stronger than when they had started that morning. They had fed him small amounts often during the day and they were now sure that he had been right when he said that hunger was all that ailed him. So, while the blacks were getting the meal ready, he told them how he had been attacked by the pigmies and how his hired natives had deserted him.

"What were they going to do with you?" Jack asked.

"I don't know," he admitted. "Ever since they got me they have fed me just enough to keep me alive. In fact I never thought a man could live on such a small amount of food. I sometimes used to wonder if they were experimenting on me to find out how small an amount of food would keep a man alive but I don't suppose they know enough for that."

"But they know how to track through the forest if they don't know anything else," Sol said grimly.

"Perhaps they don't think we're worth chasing," Jack suggested.

"Well, I never did like to be unappreciated," George laughed, "but this is one time when I think I can stand it."

"What are we going to do if they catch us?" Jack asked.

"That's what I've been trying to decide ever since we started," Sol told him. "How many men are there in the tribe?" he asked, turning to Mr. Lakewood.

"Thirty-three."

"And there's nine of us."

"That's less than four to one, not so bad," Jack declared.

"And we'll be better armed," Bob added.

"What do you say?" Sol asked, again turning to Mr. Lakewood.

"There's only one thing to do," he told him, "and that is to fight. If they capture us it'll be worse than death. Can you count on the blacks to fight?"

"I'm sure of it," Sol assured him.

"Then we'll fight."

"They use blowpipes, I suppose?"

"Yes, and a lot of them are very good with them."

"I'd rather they used gattling guns," Sol said with a grim smile.

"Our play will be to keep them from getting near enough to use them," Mr. Lakewood told him.

"If we can," Sol added.

Supper was soon ready and all tried to make it a cheerful meal but the effort was not entirely successful. The situation was too serious for them to shut their eyes to it and they couldn't help wondering if the meal was to be their last.

"If we get out of this I'll never get lost again," Mr. Lakewood declared as he finished eating. "Hereafter I'm going to stay at home where I belong."

"I suppose so," Jack said dryly.

It was half an hour later when Tom came hurriedly to where they were sitting in front of one of the tents.

"Them come," he announced.

"You sure?" Sol asked him.

"Me sure."

"How far away are they?"

"Mile, mebby little more."

"Which means that they'll be here in about twenty minutes," Sol mused. "How many of them are there?"

Tom held up both hands and opened his fingers three times.

"About thirty, eh?"

"Them's all."

The place where they had camped was by the side of a shallow stream some ten feet in width and they had pitched their tents on the side opposite that to which the savages would come. Fortunately their side was bare of trees for a distance of twenty feet or more from the stream and Sol at once ordered the blacks to move all the tents back into the woods.

"Our job'll be to keep them from crossing that brook," he said when the tents had been repitched.

"But they may cross farther up or down," Bob suggested.

"They may for a fact but they're pretty dumb as a rule and perhaps they won't think of that move," Sol told him.

"Can they shoot those darts this far?" Bob asked.

"Not with any degree of accuracy," Sol told him. "But we want to keep out of sight just the same."

"I see one of them," Jack whispered a moment later.

"Where?" Bob asked.

"Just side of that big tree there."

As he spoke a little black man hardly more than five feet tall stepped out in plain view.

Sol slowly raised his rifle and took a careful aim. As the shot rang out the savage dodged back into the thick woods.

"Missed him," Jack cried.

"I meant to," Sol told him. "You see I don't want to kill one of them unless I have to. Oh, yes, I know he'd kill me on sight but I'm supposed to be civilized and he isn't."

"You think that shot'll scare them away?" George asked.

"No, I don't think it will but it may," Sol told him.

"Here's hoping," Bob said.

"Here too," Jack added.

Half an hour passed and they had seen no more of the pigmies. Sol had one of the blacks watching above the camp and one below with orders to let him know at once should they cross over but no word had come from them.

"Suppose they've gone back?" Bob asked.

"Maybe, but I doubt it," Sol told him.

"Probably waiting till it gets dark," Jack suggested.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Sol said.

"Well, they won't have long to wait," George added.

"No, it'll be dark in another half hour," Mr. Lakewood told them.

"Why, wouldn't it be a good plan to take a sneak right now?" Jack suggested.

"For a number of reasons," Sol told him. "In the first place we couldn't get away without them knowing it. They may be dumb in a good many ways but, believe me, we couldn't make a move but they'd know it. And, in the second place we're in no condition to travel to-night."

"That's no joke," Bob declared as Sol paused. "I'm too tired to move let alone travel."

"And in the third place," Sol continued, "we're in a better position to defend ourselves here than we would be most anywhere else."

"No doubt about that." Mr. Lakewood confirmed the statement.

"The moon'll be up and pretty near full to-night," George said a moment later.

"Which ought to help a lot," Bob added.

"Yes, it'll help if it only stays clear," Sol agreed.

"You think it's going to cloud up?" Bob asked.

"Hope not, but it doesn't look real good to me. Besides I've got a toe that always aches just before

a rain and it's not feeling any too good right now," Sol told him.

As dusk began to gather over the forest they watched the sky anxiously hoping that Sol's toe might for once prove unreliable. But they were doomed to be disappointed for the clouds gathered rapidly and before it was dark a light rain was falling.

"Not so good," Jack declared disgustedly.

"We won't be able to see our hand before our face in another half hour," Bob told them.

"Well, what can't be cured must be endured," George reminded him.

"There's no use in all of us keeping awake," Sol said about nine o'clock. "Mat and I'll watch till twelve and then I'll call you three boys."

"Honest injun?" Bob asked.

"Honest injun," Sol smiled.

"How about me?" Mr. Lakewood asked. "I'm going to do my part."

"You'll help more by getting your strength back than in any other way," Sol told him and, knowing that he was right, he made no further objection.

"I know I won't sleep a wink," Jack declared as he stretched himself out on the ground beneath the tent.

"As if a body could sleep knowing that we're

likely to be attacked any minute," Bob chimed in.

"And I couldn't close my eyes if my life depended on it," George added.

But in spite of these statements all three were sound asleep in less than ten minutes. Mr. Lakewood, however, in the tent close by, found it harder to lose himself. He, better than the others, knew the fate that awaited them should they fall into the hands of the savages and the terrible anticipation kept him awake till nearly eleven o'clock when he fell into a troubled sleep.

"I told you I couldn't go to sleep," Jack muttered when, shortly after twelve o'clock, Sol touched him on the arm.

"Well, you've been putting up a pretty fair imitation of it," Sol told him as he shook the others awake.

"Anything happened?" Bob asked rubbing his eyes.

"Not a thing. I think maybe they've given it up."

"Then they quit mighty easy," George told them.

"But we don't want to be too sure of it," Jack added.

"You call me at three o'clock if nothing happens," Sol ordered. "We want to be on the move at the first break of day."

"Where's Tom?" Bob asked.

"He's been scouting around most of the time and the other two are keeping watch above and below the camp. Tom's just gone to sleep for an hour or two."

"How about the other two?" George asked.

"Mat and Tom'll relieve them about two o'clock," Sol told them. "They can get along with mighty little sleep for a long time," he added as he stretched out on the ground. "Let me know at once if you hear anything suspicious."

"We'll do that all right," Bob promised.

It had stopped raining but the sky was still overcast and, although it was not pitch dark, it was still far from being light. They could just barely make out the outline of the forest on the other side of the stream and the silence was so absolute that Jack declared it got on his nerves.

"If an owl would only hoot," he sighed.

"Even the screech of a Maine wild cat would be welcome," Bob added.

"Maybe we'll get too much noise before long," George reminded them.

"Well, I do hope we'll get out of this without having to kill any of those fellows," Bob said a few minutes later.

"That's all right," Jack replied, "but here's one

guy that's hoping a whole lot more that we'll get out without them killing any of us."

"A consumation devoutly to be desired," George declared.

"No high dictionary stuff," Jack told him.

"If this was up in God's country I'd soon find out whether or not those fellows have given up and gone back," Bob declared. "I don't see why Sol hasn't had Mat or Tom or one of the others do a little scouting.

"Same here, but I reckon he knows his stuff," Jack said. "Those fellows are not Indians and they're not Canucks."

"What's that got to do with it?" George demanded.

"I'll pass, only I was trying to convey the idea that maybe you can't do the same here as you could if we were up in Maine," Jack explained.

"And you did a mighty poor job of it if you ask me," Bob told him.

'I didn't think I was getting away with it in very good shape," Jack confessed.

"Perhaps they have a superstition that it's unlucky or something of the sort to fight at night and are waiting till it gets light," George suggested.

"Hark!" Bob whispered some time later.

"Did you hear something?" Jack whispered.

"Thought I did; listen," Bob replied.

All three strained their ears but for several minutes there was no sound.

"Guess I imagined it," Bob whispered, "but I thought I heard a splash as though some one had thrown a stone in the stream."

"I heard that," George told him, "but I thought probably it was a fish jumping."

"Maybe it was," Bob said.

"And maybe it wasn't," Jack declared as, just then, the sound was repeated. "Somebody's coming across out there."

"Had we better call Sol?" Bob whispered.

"I suppose we had. We don't want to take a chance, you know," Jack replied.

"I'll get him," George said, "It's most time to call him anyway."

Bob glanced at his watch and saw that it was almost three o'clock.

"Where has the time gone?" he whispered to Jack. "I knew we'd waited a long time between talks but I didn't think it was that late."

George was back with Sol in less than five minutes but, as the sound had not been heard again, they decided to make no move but to wait.

"Mat and Tom'll be getting breakfast in another fifteen minutes," Sol told them.

In less than that they heard faint sounds back in the woods which told them that their blacks were at work and a little after half past three they were all eating breakfast together.

"Are we going to beat it right off?" Bob asked.

"That's my plan if it meets with the approval of the rest," Sol told him. "Fact is we're getting pretty short on rations and ought not to lose a minute in getting back."

No one made any objection and, as soon as they had finished eating, they sat about getting ready for the start. It was now getting light and, as they had unpacked only what was absolutely necessary, it took but a few minutes. Mr. Lakewood, in spite of all their arguments, insisted that he was strong enough to walk and they had to give in to him although Sol predicted that he would not last long.

"But every little bit'll help, you know," he told them.

They started shortly after four-thirty in the usual order except that Sol ordered Mat to keep about a hundred feet behind them to guard against a surprise attack from the rear.

"I have a hunch that we're going to hear from them before we've gone very far although I sin-

cerely hope I'm wrong," he said as they started.

For an hour they made good time although Sol had ordered Tom not to set too fast a pace on account of Mr. Lakewood. The storm had passed and the sun was peeping between rifts in the clouds and they knew that in a short time it would begin to get hot. Then, shortly before six o'clock, the attack came. They had reached a space where for a mile or a little more, the forest was more open than usual when Mat caught up with Sol who was behind the others.

"Them come," he announced.

"How far back?" Sol asked.

"Only little way."

"Then we'd better make a stand right here," Sol told them. "There's no use trying to get away from them and we'll be better off here in the thick than out there ahead where it's more open. Everyone get behind a tree and don't expose yourself any more than you can help. And now," he added grimly, "when you shoot shoot to kill."

It was soon evident that the savages had no thought of making a surprise attack for, hardly had they each picked a tree, when they heard them coming. A moment later Bob saw a movement about thirty feet from his hiding place and, although he was not sure it was made by a man, he took quick

aim and fired. It was the opening shot of the fight and was followed by a shriek of either pain or rage, he was not sure which.

"Reckon you got him," Jack, who was behind a tree hardly three feet away, shouted.

Followed several more shots from the others but no other shrieks resulted. Then came showers of tiny drats evidently aimed at random.

"Keep covered," Sol shouted. "A prick from one of those darts means death."

"I suppose some of them'll get round on the others side of us before long," Jack said.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Bob replied.

"But it's pretty open out that way and they can't get very near that's one thing in our favor."

"And we want to keep our eyes peeled in that direction."

"Look sharp," Sol's voice rang out a moment later. "They're trying to surround us."

The caution was followed by the sharp bark of his automatic and a cry undoubtedly of pain followed.

"I reckon that fellow got bit all right," Jack muttered.

"It's their lives or ours now," Sol cried as he fired again. "Shoot every time you see a thing to shoot at and shoot to kill: It's our only chance."

The entire party, blacks as well as whites, were

emptying their automatics nearly as fast as they could reload and it was evident that not all the shots were being wasted. Still they knew that, in spite of it all, the circle of their enemies was gradually growing smaller. They were all now lying flat on their stomachs the better to avoid the darts which were flying over their heads. Fortunately there was some undergrowth all around them which made it impossible for the pigmies to blow their darts low enough to hit them. But the same growth made it possible for the pigmies to conceal themselves so as to offer a very poor target. Slight movements and faint noises were about all they had to shoot at.

"Looks like the end to me," Bob said in a low tone so that Jack just caught the words.

"Never say die," he muttered.

A few minutes later, when they knew that it was only a matter of moments when their enemies would, in all probability, rush them and hope was nearly gone, a sound off to their right caught their ears.

"What's that?" Jack cried.

"Sounds like a band of elephants," Sol told him.

"Him many elephant," Tom assured them.

"And they're coming this way pretty fast," Bob declared a moment later.

The sound of huge bodies making their way

through the forest was soon plainly audible and it was evident that they were coming directly toward them.

"Keep down flat and keep perfectly still," Sol shouted.

The snorting of the huge beasts told them that the herd was either frightened or enraged and they were uncertain as to what effect it was to have on the situation. But soon they saw that the pigmies were much alarmed at the coming of the elephants and it was evident that they were rapidly making their way back toward the stream.

"Hope it isn't a case of out of the frying pan into the fire," Bob declared.

"I'd rather have the elephants than those darts," Jack replied.

Ten minutes later the herd, numbering about twenty, crashed by not more than three or four rods to their right.

"Come on, now, we've got to beat it," Sol ordered as soon as the beasts had passed." They may turn any minute."

Grabbing up their packs they were on the march in almost no time and all the rest of the day they pushed on as rapidly a possible. To their great surprise Mr. Lakewood's strength seemed to have returned nearly to normal and, save for short intervals

when Mat or Tom carried him, he delayed them but little.

They reckoned that they had made not less than thirty miles when Sol decided to camp for the night. A watch was, of course kept through the night but nothing happened and early the next morning they started off in high spirits feeling that they were safe from that tribe at any rate. Fortunately they were, in the days that followed, lucky in getting plenty of game to replenish their rapidly diminishing larder and three weeks later they reached Matadi tired but happy that they had been successful in their mission. Here they were obliged to wait three days before they were able to get a boat to take them to Loanda. But they were fortunate to reach Loanda just in time to catch a steamer for New York.

Early in September they sailed in past the Statue of Liberty and, after bidding George and Sol good-by, they caught the Bar Harbor Express for Maine.

"But why did you stop sending pictures?" was the first question their father asked after greetings were over at the station in Skowhegan.

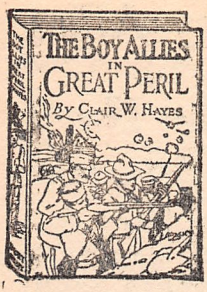
"We couldn't get anything and didn't suppose you could," Bob told him. "I'll have to look over the set to-morrow."

"Well, boys, that makes twice you've saved my life," Uncle Si told them as they sat on the porch of the old home after supper that night.

"And I think, Si, it's about time you settled down," Mrs. Lakewood sighed.

"And I know right well that that's just what I'm going to do," Uncle Si smiled back.

THE END



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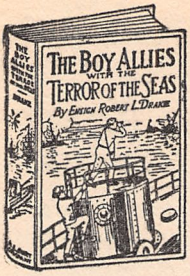

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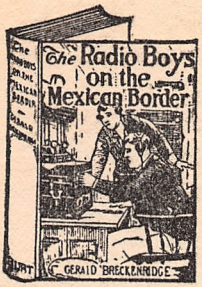

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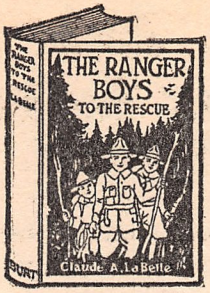

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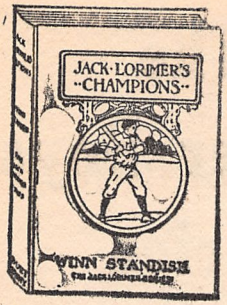

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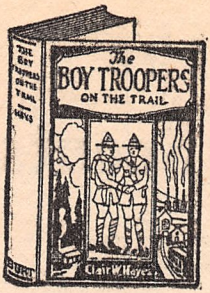

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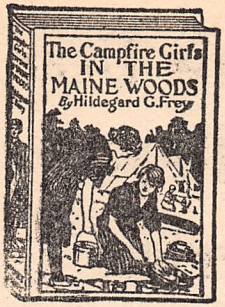

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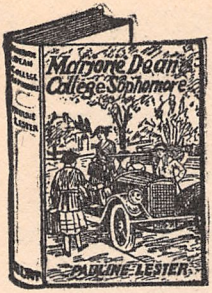

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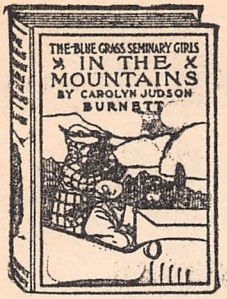

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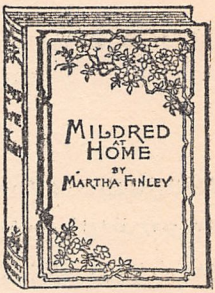

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